Tamil TIMES

Vol XVI No.3 ISSN 0266-4488 15 MARCH 1997 90p

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION
UK/India/Sri Lanka .....£15/US$25
Australia .....Aus$45
(Australian bank cheques only)
Canada .....Can$40
USA .....US$35
All other countries .....£20/US$35

Lawrence Thilakar, international spokesman for the LTTE - reported to be in northern Sri Lanka for talks with the Tiger leadership

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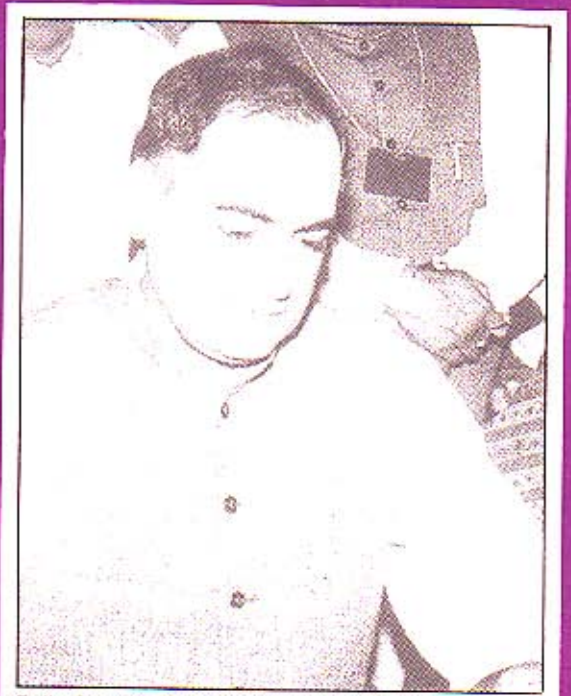

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Tamil TIMES

ISSN 0266 - 4488

Vol.XV1 No.3
15 MARCH 1997

Published by:

TAMIL TIMES LTD
P,O, BOX 121
SUTTON, SURREY SM1 3TD
UNITED KINGDOM

Phone: 0181-644 0972
Fax: 0181-241 4557

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

UK/India/Sri Lanka .....£15/US$25
Australia .....Aus$45
(Australian bank cheques only)
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Political Violence

The ongoing campaign for local government elections has been characterised by a resurgence of widespread political violence. The violence that commenced with the murder in broad daylight witnessed by many members of the public of a Member of Parliament belonging to the government has continued unabated throughout the campaign. Independent election monitoring bodies and the police have recorded over 1500 incidents of election related violence. Most complaints concern arson, destruction of property, intimidation, thuggery and physical violence.

That a Member of Parliament belonging to the opposition United National Party(UNP) is arraigned as the prime suspect in shooting dead the government MP comes as no surprise to those who have experienced the long history of terror and political violence practised by the UNP during its 17-year rule. It was during this period that criminalisation of politics was developed into a fine art. As one commentator put it, "contract killers and professional bomb-makers were even appointed to the ruling party's working committee. The UNP leader, Mr.Ranil Wickremasinghe's saintly image, constantly propped up by the privately owned English press in Colombo, stands in sharp contrast with his inability, or rather refusal, to purge the party he leads of these utterly criminal elements."

On the other hand, the failure of the present Peoples Alliance government has been its timidity to take timely and appropriate action to root out political violence and remove from circulation the instruments which enable it to be practised. Literally thousands of lethal firearms issued or acquired legally and illegally during the previous regime have been in the possession of a large number of politicians and their so-called body guards. If the government wanted to cleanse society of the gun culture to which it has become accustomed, then it should have acted promptly to confiscate all these weapons. But it did not. The belated call for the voluntary surrender of weapons, though welcome, is two years too late.

The politicians of the PA cannot be absolved from blame for the proliferation of politically motivated violent incidents. Some well known politicians of the PA have themselves not been reluctant to deploy thuggery and violence directed at their opponents. The past year witnessed their violent disposition in Negambo and Puttalam, some of them behaving like common gangsters attacking the supporters of the UNP. The poison of political violence introduced by the UNP would appear to have infected some sections of the PA as well.

On a more fundamental level, in discussing the current wave of election related violence, it should be realised that the south of the country cannot remain peaceful and non-violent when the only instruments of discourse in the north and east of the country are the bomb and the bullet. The south and its people have not, and in fact could not have remained immune from the damaging effects of the sheer intensity and cruelty of the violence involved in the ongoing war in the north-east. The continuation of the war in the north-east has of necessity adversely impinged upon the democratic and civil governance of the whole country which has been under a state of emergency since 1983. Emergency regulations and provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act have been frequently invoked. The role of the military and the police in the day to day affairs of the country has become more pronounced because the government of the day has to depend on these forces to prosecute the war in the north-east.

It should not be forgotten that the seeds of politically motivated violence that was to emerge in later years and which characterises the northeast now were sown in the south way back in 1956 when Tamil politicians peacefully performing a satiyagraha at Galle Face Green Colombo in protest against the Sinhala Only bill were subjected to violent attacks as the forces of "law and order" watched with approval setting scene for what was to develop into an uncontrollable escalation of ethnic and political violence which today permeates the entire fabric of the society and predetermines the working of the institutions of the state and the political processes in the country.

The campaign to arrest the resurgence of political violence in Sri Lanka deserves support. But, until a peaceful negotiated solution to the ethnic conflict is reached and the ongoing war in the northeast is brought to an end, it is doubted whether the phenomenon of political violence can be eradicated for good even in the south of the country.

NEWS REVIEW

CALL AGAINST POLITICAL VIOLENCE

In the context of an upsurge of widespread political violence associated with the forthcoming local government elections in Sri Lanka, the Coalition Against Political Violence, composed of several individuals associated with human rights and political organisations issued the following statement on February 13 :

The Coalition against Political Violence deeply regrets and unreservedly condemns the killing of Mr. Nalanda Ellawala, MP, at Kuruwita on 11 February by gunmen travelling in a UNP convoy. It also condemns the acts of arson and destruction that followed the killing, even though such actions might have been motivated by deep feelings of outrage at this blatant act of murder.

The Coalition against Political Violence, comprising of organisations and individuals committed to peaceful politics, has drawn the attention of all political parties to the threat to democracy posed by renewed acts of political violence during the last few months; it also emphasised the danger that, unless stopped, this trend could vitiate the local government elections. We, together with many human rights organisations, have repeatedly pointed out that the illegal possession of guns by politicians and those close to them has contributed to the escalation of violence.

The danger that we foresaw is now before us. The threat of violence now hangs over the entire election campaign. We say strongly that the use of violence as a weapon of intimidation is a gross violation of the democratic rights of the people.

The "democratic" political parties must also realise that, at a practical level, the use of violence as well as recourse to private acts of revenge in retaliation are counter-productive; their perceived benefits are necessarily short-term and in the last analysis will help only those forces which are dedicated to the realisation of their political goals by the use of violent means.

The Coalition therefore appeals to all political parties to take a principled stand against the use of violence and thuggery and to join together in denouncing its use and instructing their supporters to refrain from all acts of violence. If their stand is to achieve credibility, they must also remove or suspend from political activity all those who are accused of acts of violence presently and in the past. It is only then that a free and fair election, the hallmark of a democratic polity, can take place.

The UNP, whose provincial leaders are alleged to have been behind this murder, has a special responsibility to act decisively now. It must disassociate itself from these persons and co-operate in ensuring that they subject themselves to the due process of law.

The Coalition appeals to the government to conduct an impartial inquiry into these incidents and to let the law take its course against all who are accused of these crimes. It must also act immediately to disarm all politicians.

The Coalition intends to approach all political parties to persuade them into joint action against political violence and hopes that their endeavours to ensure a peaceful democratic practice will meet with a good response. ❑

On the Military Front

Even before government forces had time to bask in glory in the aftermath of their Operation "Edi Bala" which successfully achieved the linking up the road route from Vavuniya to Mannar, the Tigers struck simultaneously on two military bases in the east of the island on 6 March. The LTTE attacks on the pivotal Trincomalee navy base and the overrunning of the brigade headquarters at Vavunaitivu gave further confirmation that the current military pre-occupation of the Tigers is, as they lose ground in the north to the security forces, to focus their primary effort in the east of the island. And as the LTTE attacks mount, both in their frequency and intensity, the east is becoming more and more destabilised.

The recent success of Operation "Edi Bala" by government forces on the one hand, and latest attacks by the Tigers in the east merely reinforces their ability to strike at will and has little to do with the ability of either party to the conflict to be able to win the war in the long term.

Commenting on the LTTE attacks, Pakiasothy Saravanamuttu, a consultant at the Centre for Policy Studies and Alternatives, an independent think-tank, told Reuters on 7 March, "It is part and parcel of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's (LTTE) strategy to show they can exert armed pressure on the army. It is the LTTE's way of saying 'Whatever anyone might say, we're still in the game and we can inflict damage whenever we want to. We're still here and we still are key players,' The LTTE are making a political as well as a military statement."

Former air force chief Air Vice Marshall Harry Goonetileke said the attack on the well-defended China Bay base showed the LTTE's ability to sneak in small groups for surprising, fast attacks on selected targets. "It showed the audacity of the LTTE. It was a mere sabotage call by the Tigers. And it was a typical trademark LTTE guerrilla attack," Goonetileke said.

As for the offensive in the northeasern Mullaitivu area, military analysts in Colombo speculated that the real target might have been the secretive base "one-four" - a complex of sophisticated jungle camps used by the Tamil Tigers as their main military operational centre even before they were dislodged from their Jaffna stronghold in late 1995. The base is said to be provided with underground residential accommodation or the LTTE leadership and storage facilities for vast quantities of military, medical and food supplies. It was from this base, reported to be the LTTE's main communications and command centre with its vast network of underground control rooms and passages, and believed to be the hiding place of the elusive Tiger leader, Vellupillai Pirabhakaran, that the Tamil Tigers kept at bay and survived the might of the Indian army during their ill-fated encounter in Sri Lanka's ethnic imbroglio between 1987 and 1990.

Analysts discounted that the offensive was part of any bigger military strategy to destroy the LTTE's nerve-centre of operations. Others thought that the offensive was in the nature of a pre-emptive strike following intelligence reports of a LTTE build-up in the area in preparation for a major attack on government forces. Confirming this analysis, a navy official told Reuters, "It was a well co-ordinated, pre-emptive strike on all LTTE bases in the area. An LTTE build-up for an attack was reported in the area. Our attacks should disrupt their plans and also cause heavy casualties."

When the army spokesman announced on 14 March that the operation was over, it was evident that the forces were not yet ready to confront the LTTE head-on for a decisive showdown. ❑

LTTE Intensifies Attacks in the East

Tigers struck at Sri Lankan forces on 6 March with pre-dawn attacks on two military bases in the island's east.

The Tiger attack which commenced at about 11.30 pm on the Trincomalee base lasted nearly three hours before they withdrew in the face of the ground and air counter-attack by government forces. Reports indicated that at least 300 to 400 Tigers attacked the China Bay airforce base with rocket launchers and mortars. The Tigers had in advance penetrated the highly fortified air-base accompanied by suicide cadres with explosives strapped around their bodies, and according to the military's claim, they found the bodies of four suicide attackers.

A military spokesman admitted that one air force man was killed and four wounded and a Chinese-made Y12 transport plane severely damaged during the LTTE attack. The LTTE's Voice of Tigers radio station said the rebels destroyed a Y-12 transport plane and damaged a Mi-24 helicopter gunship in the attack on China Bay.

The security forces in the eastern port town of Trincomalee are reported to have been taken by complete surprise by the attack on the local air force base.

At about the same time as the Trincomalee attack, the Tigers numbering over 500 launched more determined fierce assault upon the Vavunativu army camp, located just outside Batticaloa.

A bridge connecting the base with the main road to Batticaloa had been blown up by the attacking Tigers to prevent the movement of troop reinforcements.

The military admitted that the camp was overrun by the Tigers. It took 12 hours for military reinforcements to reached the camp and by that time 65 soldiers and policemen including two officers had been killed, and over a hundred of the soldiers were wounded, according to a statement from the Ministry of Defence. More than 35 soldiers were wounded in the raid, he added.

Claiming that they killed over 160 retreating Tigers, military officials admitted rebels had set fire and destroyed several buildings at the army base and carried away rifles and ammunition. Soldiers held onto a small part of the base, aided by helicopter gunships that arrived at dawn and strafed the rebels with rockets and canon fire, the officials said.

Contradicting the defence ministry claim as to the number of Tigers killed, the Voice of Tigers' radio quoting the LTTE's official newspaper "Eelanatham" said that 84 Tigers were killed, including two high-ranking guerrilla officers, but did not give the number of rebel wounded. The newspaper carried a photograph of three "Black Tiger" suicide bombers with the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, taken shortly before they left for the China Bay attack, the radio said. "The LTTE, which deliberately kept a low profile for the past several months, proved once again they can launch fierce attacks in any part of the north and the east," the radio said.

In a statement issued through their London office in respect of the attack at Trincomalee, the Tigers said, "LTTE forces have largely destroyed Sri Lanka's most heavily fortified airbase located in the island's eastern district of Trincomallee. The attack launched on Wednesday night also effectively destroyed a Y-12 aircraft and two anti-aircraft guns.

"A unit of Black Tigers penetrated the maximum-security China Bay base at around midnight killing several airforce personnel and blasting away a major portion of the compound. The base - located at the nerve-centre of Sri Lanka's military operations - remains out of action for the moment. Three LTTE soldiers died in the operation: Major Sittampalam, Captain Nivethan and Captain Vijayaruban."

On the following day on 8 March, the LTTE's office in London issued a statement giving details of the attack on the camp at Vavunathivu. It said, "The Sri Lankan defence ministry yesterday issued false details of Thursday's LTTE attack on an army camp at Vavunativu. Here follow the real events:

"At 1.05 Thursday morning LTTE units launched a major offensive on the strategic Vavunathivu army camp in Batticaloa district. The camp housed 300 members of the Sri Lankan army and formed part of the military's forward defence lines protecting its main camp in Batticaloa town. After six hours of heavy fighting Sri Lankan troops fled leaving LTTE to take over and demolish the camp. LTTE captured much hi-tech equipment including a 50-calibre gun. A rescue effort from Batticaloa's main army camp ended in disaster for Sri Lankan troops. A connecting bridge to the captured base was blasted as soldiers tried to make their way across and the remaining troops came under intense fire from LTTE units. Sri Lankan military casualties in this failed rescue bid are significant, though exact figures were not discernible.

"Consequently, Sri Lankan Puccara bombers, MI24's and Bell helicopter- gunships arrived on the scene to launch airstrikes against LTTE fighters at the captured camp. However, these fighter-planes were swiftly driven away by LTTE retaliatory fire and did not subsequently return. There followed persistent shelling of the LTTE-captured camp from two army positions - Batticaloa's nearby military airbase and Kommanthurai. LTTE fighters returned fire at the airbase and resultant troop casualties are presumed high. In the entire incident LTTE casualties amounted to 84, including the death of Lt Col. Mathana (commander of the Batticaloa-Amparai women's' brigade) and Lt. Col. Palendra (commander of the Vinodhan brigade)." ❑

Military Offensive in Mullaitivu

A combined army, navy and air force operation began in the early hours of 13 March in a declared bid "to destroy all known rebel bases in the jungles of the northeastern Mullaitivu district and along the eastern seaboard", and according to defence officials artillery, war planes and navy vessels have been pounding a Tamil Tigers' base reported to be the headquarters of the LTTE in north-east Sri Lanka.

The Tamil Tigers, in statements issued from their London office, claimed that he government's official claim of targeting LTTE bases was totally false. Each and every target struck has been a civilian one. This could quite easily be verified were Sri Lanka to permit journalists to the north.

A military official claimed, "Air force pilots have reported direct hits on targets: Ground troops monitoring rebel radio transmissions say the rebels have suffered heavy casualties and are asking for reinforcements."

"LTTE camps in the area were pounded for three or four hours starting at dawn," the official said. "Sea Tiger" bases were also attacked, and several camps in the base complex and others on the coast were destroyed, the he said.

Military spokesman Brigadier Tissa Jayatunga said, "Ground troops monitoring enemy radio transmissions say the terrorists suffered heavy casualties and are asking for help from their leaders." Several camps in the base complex and others on the coast were destroyed during the offensive, he said. Jayatunga declined comment on reports that troops from the Weli Oya army base, about 40 km (25 miles) south of Mullaitivu, were advancing on the LTTE's "1-4 base" stronghold. "Ground troops are there in certain locations in the area but we can't say where," he said.

A statement from the LTTE's London office on 13 March said, "Sri Lankan artillery pieces are ferociously shelling surrounding Tamil villages from Manal-Aru military base. Meanwhile Puccara and Kfir jets have flown several sorties dropping bombs and unleashing rocket-fire on these residential areas. The raid started at 5.30 this morning and is still continu-

ing at 9.00 am, when this report was filed. It is reasonably assumed human life has been lost though precise details are difficult to ascertain while the assault is continuing."

As the military onslaught continued, the Tigers in another statement issued from their London office said, "Sri Lanka yesterday launched co-ordinated military strikes on residential areas of Mullaitivu killing many civilians, destroying homes and creating yet another flow of refugees. The attack - using air, ground and naval forces - terrorised coastal and interior Tamil villages for a full 8 hours. Residents are still reeling in shock from the ferocity of the onslaught.

"It began at 5.30 in the morning with long- and medium- range artillery fire targeted at ordinary villages. Later, navy gunboats in the eastern seas fired cannons directly at coastal settlements which house mainly Tamil fishing families. Most homes between Alampil and Challai - on the northeastern coast - have been damaged beyond repair. The renowned St. Vellankanni Catholic Church has also been blasted to rubble.

"There has been an exodus of people - joining the swelling ranks of the Vanni displaced - clambering to safer places inland, mainly Uduppukulam, Kumulamunai, Thaneerutu and Mulliyawallai. An array of devastated fishing villages meanwhile lie deserted.

"Air attacks on the interior began at 7.30am. Puccaras dropped bombs and unleashed rockets on selected civilian concentrations then ran another sortie at 12.15pm. Kfirs accomplished the same mission first at 8.00am and again at 10.55am. The firing from all quarters was relentless the whole day with Mullaitivu treated effectively as a 'free-strike zone'. The scene among the people was one of unbridled panic and disorder. People are still visibly shaken with many children badly traumatised.

"The government's official claim of targeting LTTE bases is totally false. Each and every target struck has been a civilian one. This could quite easily be verified were Sri Lanka to permit journalists to the north."

On 14 March, an army spokesman said that the operation in the island's north-east was over. "The strike is now over. It was a limited operation," military spokesman Brigadier Tissa Jayatunga told the press. ❑

Mannar-Vavuniya Road Opened

Operation EDI BALA, the largest military offensive launched by the security forces this year, ended with a formal announcement on 20 February by the Ministry of Defence that it had been successful in linking up troops moving from Vavuniya with troops moving from Mannar. One of the key aims of the operation which commenced on 4 February was to secure the Vavuniya-Mannar road which had remained obstructed for years. Mannar and the island of Talaimannar north of the town have been under the control of the army while the surrounding areas had been controlled by the Tigers. Mannar was accessible to government forces only by sea.

Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte, accompanied by senior military officials, made the inaugural 80-km (50-mile) journey between the two towns on Friday, military officials said.

According to the announcement the operation met with little resistance from the LTTE although statement from its London office on 12 February had promised to prevent the advance by troops and predicted a "tremendous clash". "The road from Vavuniya to Mannar is now open," the statement said.

With the road to Mannar from Vavuniya was formally opened for public transport on Saturday February 22, he army said it would set up a checkpoint at Paraiyanalankulam to control civilian movements to and from the Mannar district, in much the same way as the present checkpoint in Thandikulam in Vavuniya operates.

Following the operation, the army now appears to have gained control of the north-western seaboard of the island which provides access to the Indian coast, and of the Wilpattu jungles. Both these locations were critical to the LTTE in terms of communicating with India and Colombo. The loss of these areas can have a major impact on the LTTE's ability to operate in the Vanni region, a source from Vavuniya said.

However, given the shortage of man/woman power in the Sri Lankan security forces at present, the logistics of holding on to this large expanse of territory seem insurmountable. Added to this is the possibility of attacks by the LTTE which up to now has not resisted the advance of troops.

Relief agencies reported that over 10,000 people who had been displaced by this operation had moved into the Open Relief Centre run by the UNHCR in Madhu. A further 5000 had arrived at the Camp in Palampiddy.

"In this military offensive, like all others, Sri Lankan troops have been bulldozing their way through Tamil territory without regard for civilian casualties," an LTTE statement said. It added that Tamils had been forced to flee to India "as a last resort to escape the army advance."

As the advance by troops continued, a statement by the LTTE on 12 February said, "Sri Lanka's 'Operation Edibala' is continuing with troops setting fire to Tamil crops as they advance. So far, a string of Tamil villages between Vavuniya and Mannar have been occupied. Soldiers descended on these villages like swarms of locusts sending residents running in terror as their homes were bombed and bulldozed. Acres of rice fields have been purposely scorched during the assault in what is becoming a more and more typical military tactic. While enforcing a food blockade to Tamil areas, Sri Lanka is systematically wiping out Tamils' own attempts at cultivation. The airforce, meanwhile, is targeting houses and public buildings making it difficult for civilians to return to their lives. Around 10,000 displaced Tamils are already crammed into Maddu Church refugee camp. Other displaced civilians have sought safety in the town of Iranai Illupaikulam."

On February 21, an Antonov 32 aircraft that had just taken off from the airfield in Ratmalana with a full load of servicemen bound for the north crashed into a marshy field next to the runway. 4 persons were killed and 40 others injured in this crash.

"The inactivity of the UNHCR over the past two years has been astounding," the LTTE said in a scathing attack on the United Nations refugee agency. A statement by the Tamil Tigers from their office in London said on 25 February that UNHCR, has been turning a blind eye to the problems faced by tens of thousands displaced Tamils by recent military operations by government troops in the northern Sri Lanka.

The LTTE statement said that the recent offensive "Edi Bala" by government forces had created more than 17,500 refugees. "Despite this, the UNHCR has not yet made any meaningful steps to press Sri Lanka into easing its embargo to refugee areas. The inactivity of the UNHCR over the past two years has been astounding."

UNHCR's representative in Colombo, Peter Meijer, declining to comment on the LTTE's accusation, said about 10,000 people had fled their homes ahead of the army advance and were at a relief centre at Madhu, 40 km (25 miles) west of Vavuniya. "This centre already had about 7,000 displaced persons from earlier offensives. So there are about 17,000 displaced people there at the moment," Meijer said. "I understand there is enough food for the people at the camp. Everything at the moment is under control," he said. The camp also had enough medicine, Guillermo Bertoletti of the French aid agency Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) told the press. ❑

Lawrence Thilakar's Secret Mission

It has been reported that Lawrence Thilakar, the Paris-based international spokesman for the LTTE, had secretly arrived in northern Sri Lanka to have discussions with the Tamil Tiger leadership. Reports said that Thilakar had come to brief the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran on possible moves to resume peace talks.

Tamil sources in Paris confirmed that Thilakar has not been seen or available to be contacted in Paris where he is normally resident. The reports about his visit, though widely circulated, has not been denied by the LTTE either in Sri Lanka or from abroad.

Newspapers in Colombo speculated that Thilakar had entered the country via Nepal and India using a false name. They said he had arrived on a LTTE-owned cargo ship and been picked up by Sea Tiger boats off the northwestern Mannar area.

It is no secret that Thilakar, as international spokesman for the LTTE, has been having contacts and talks with diplomats in western capitals who had pledged their support for a fresh round of peace talks between the LTTE and the government. It would seem that the governments of the United Kingdom, Norway, Canada, and Switzerland have expressed their willingness to play a role in facilitating the resumption of talks. ❑

Over 150 Tamils Drown in Boat Disaster

At least 150 Tamils, including several women and children, fleeing from the escalating military operations by government forces against Tamil Tigers in northern Sri Lanka drowned when their overcrowded boat sank off the northwest coast of the island on 20 February.

The India-bound boat, carrying refugees to India, nearly 35 miles away, capsized and sank Palk Straits, in which the Sea Tigers, the naval wing of the LTTE freely operate, soon after it left the LTTE base at Nachchikuddah village in northwest Sri Lanka.

Reports quoting LTTE radio broadcasts said that only 20 out of a total of 170 passengers could be rescued. The LTTE had recovered 130 bodies. Seventy people were missing, including 22 children. The search for the bodies of other victims was continuing, a report said.

This type of tragedy faced by fleeing Tamils is not new in that similar incidents have occurred in the past. Last October, 14 people, including eight children and four women, drowned when another boat carrying Tamil refugees capsized.

A LTTE statement dated 13 March said, "Suitcases and luggage have been recovered from the sea where 130 Tamils drowned trying to escape to India during a recent army offensive. The luggage is now being offered back to relatives of the deceased. The Tamil Eelam police in Mankulam are now in possession of the items and have said survivors and next-of-kin of those who died may recover their belongings." ❑

MP's Assailants Surrender

UNP MP Susantha Punchinilame, one of the principal suspects in the Nalanda Ellawela murder case, surrendered to a Magistrate in Colombo on 20 February. There was an islandwide search instituted for Mr. Punchinilame following eye witness accounts of the killing that identified him as being one of those with gun in hand at the scene of the incident. Dilan Perera MP, who was with Ellawela when he was shot has also identified Punchinilame as one of those involved in the incident.

Susantha Punchinilame was accompanied by attorney Ms. Deemani Baddewela when he gave himself up to Acting Magistrate, Colombo, Jayantha Dias Nanayakkara. Mr. Punchinilame, who is now minus his beard, has been remanded at Mahara Prison under maximum security conditions.

Previously, the other suspects including former Ratnapura Mayor Mahinda Ratnatilleke and Punchinileme's bodyguards had surrendered to Court before a Colombo Magistrate.

The Magisterial Inquiry into the deaths of MP Nalanda Ellawela and Police Constable Jayasena is now proceeding in the Ratnapura Magistrate's Court before Magistrate Arjuna Ranasinghe. Lawyers for the two principal accused Ratnatilaka and Punchinilame have asked that the case be shifted to another

Court , preferably Colombo, since they fear for the safety of their clients if they are taken to Ratnapura. There has been no decision in this regard so far.

In the meantime, a judicial controversy has been sparked off with Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister G.L.Peiris complaining to the Chief Justice in respect of the role played by the acting Magistrate in the surrender of Punchinilame and his bodyguards.

A press release from the Justice Ministry said that the Minister had conveyed his deep concern about certain unsatisfactory developments in this regard. "Firstly, the irregular situation surrounding the surrender of the principal suspect Susantha Punchinilame last Thursday which was presided over by Acting Fort Magistrate, Jayantha Dias Nanayakkara, Attorney-at-Law. The self-same Attorney was the Counsel who accompanied two of Punchinilame's security personnel when they surrendered to court last week."

According to the Minister, this was "unseemly and improper and gives rise to an inference of conflict of interest which could have serious repercussions with regard to the public faith in the judicial process.

"Secondly, the manner in which another principal suspect, Mahinda Ratnatilleke, surrendered to the Fort Magistrate last week gives rise to certain important questions which should be answered immediately. The surrender to a Magistrate in a zone far removed from the scene of the incident, the timing of the surrender (around midnight), the question how the Magistrate was informed of the impending surrender and what steps were taken on receipt of such information, are all questions which necessarily arise in this context. The method and manner of the surrender may lead to charges of collusion and conspiracy which could irreparably damage the prestige and the independence of the judiciary, a calamitous occurrence which we all should endeavour to prevent." ❑

Three Dead in Another Plane Crash

Another Sri Lankan military plane crashed during take-off at an air base near Colombo on 21 February killing three persons and injuring 36 others. The Russian-made AN-32 plane with 59 passengers, including a four member crew, veered off the runway before crashing into a marshy patch at Ratmalana airbase, 11 km (seven miles) south of Colombo, around 10.45 a.m. (0445 GMT), according to a military spokesman.

Following the crash, Sri Lanka's air force has temporarily grounded its remaining four Russian-made Antonov-32 transport planes to carry out safety checks. The latest crash was the third incident involving an air force plane this year. In January, a Chinese-built Y-12 airplane went missing off northern Sri Lanka while on a surveillance mission. Its crew of four was never found. A few days later, an Israeli-built Kfir fighter jet fell into the sea shortly after taking off from an air force base at Katunayake, north of Colombo, due to suspected mechanical failure. The pilot ejected to safety. Also in January, an unmanned air force drone, used for reconnaissance was lost over the northern Jaffna peninsula, 320 km (200 miles) north of Colombo.

Air Vice-Marshal Anslem Peiris, the

air force chief of staff, told reporters at the site that the plane was on its way to Palaly, a key military base in northern Jaffna, and the crew had decided to abort the flight just as it was about to take off. No reason was given as to why the crew decided to abort the flight. The plane, which cracked in the middle, was removed in two sections to a hangar for investigations. Denying that the plane's loss was likely to affect the ongoing military operations, Peiris however admitted that the air force had lost several planes in the recent past. "We don't foresee any major problems. We have enough planes to see us through." He said the air force had two British-built Avros, nine Chinese-built Y-12 aircraft and 11 Russian-made MI-17 transport helicopters that could be used to ferry troops and supplies to key northern bases till the AN-32's are pushed back into service.

Analysts in Colombo said that the loss of so many aircraft in such a shot time represented a serious loss to island's relatively small airforce. The airforce has lost seven transport planes, one transport helicopter, two fighter aircraft and one unmanned drone since the war resumed in April 1995 after a 100-day truce was broken by the LTTE. ❑

ICRC Help to End Tamil-Muslim Violence

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said on 28 February that it had initiated talks between the minority Muslim and Tamil communities in Sri Lanka's east in an attempt to end communal violence there.

The ICRC said in a statement it had arranged a meeting between Muslim community leaders and political and military leaders of the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The talks took place on 27 February in eastern Batticaloa district after several deaths in recent communal clashes.

"For the first time since 1990, leaders of the Muslim community met with LTTE leaders in the east," it said. "We want to help both sides to discuss problems and allay fears and tensions," an ICRC spokesman said. He declined to give details of the talks. At least eight Muslims and three Tamils have been killed in clashes in Batticaloa district this month, according local sources.

A statement issued by the LTTE's political head of Batticaloa-Amparai following Tamil-Muslim talks on 27 February said that there was "mounting discomfort among military circles about growing affinity between Tamils and

Muslims and frantic efforts were being made by Sri Lanka to sabotage this. In the past few months a number of provocative incidents have been 'staged' by military forces to try and generate disharmony. Most recently, Sri Lanka shelled a Muslim village and immediately put out word it was the work of the LTTE. Similar stage-managed incidents can be expected in the future as empathy between Tamils and Muslims in the East continues to harden. The LTTE's political head emphasised the need for Tamils and Muslims to work together to withstand these sinister efforts and continue building on the strong friendship that exists at present." ❑

Police Launch Gun Crackdown

Sri Lankan police have launched a nation-wide crackdown on unlicensed guns to in an effort to curb the rising tide of political violence in the context of the forthcoming local elections. As the launch commenced, the government offered a one-week amnesty 26 February for persons to surrender illegal firearms and explosives, after warning that illegal ownership could bring the death penalty.

More than 1,000 police and army personnel have been conducting the raids on people suspected of possessing illegal firearms, Mohammed Nizam, deputy inspector-general of the police, crimes branch, told the press.

The crackdown came after the government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga announced recently it planned to tighten laws to bring gun-carrying political activists to justice.

"We have already taken into custody a number of unauthorised firearms and several people who had them in their possession," Nizam said. "Upon hearing this, people have voluntarily surrendered a large number of unauthorised firearms," he added.

The defence ministry said that anybody found possessing guns, explosives or an offensive weapon without lawful authority could face the death penalty or a jail term of up to 20 years. People charged with the offence would not be eligible for bail. "These regulations are not new," Nizam said. "We are reminding the public and those who possess firearms that there are strict gun laws in this country and punishment for those who violate them is severe."

Nizam said it was not possible to give exact figures of the number of guns or people in police custody because the operation was still on. "We intend to continue our programme until the last unauthorised gun is in custody," he said.

Politicians and political activists in Sri Lanka own a large number of guns, many of them unlicensed, to guard themselves against possible attack upon them.

With only about 750 weapons voluntarily handed over, the government's amnesty for the surrender of illegal weapons was extended until March 15, the Defence Ministry said on 5 March. About 170 firearms have been seized since police launched a nationwide crackdown to curb political violence ahead of March 21 local government elections, it added. ❑

JVP Makes Up With US Embassy

A JVP delegation including Propaganda Secretary Wimal Weerawansa, met with officials at the US embassy in Colombo this week. Reports say that the JVP's meeting with US officials in Colombo meant to re-assure them of the movement's commitment to democratic politics.

The JVP delegation has also informed the US embassy officials that the human rights of their members were being violated, and urged the US embassy to bring the matter to the attention of the international community. The JVP alleges that its members islandwide are being subjected to heightened surveillance and harassment in the run-up to the local government elections.

Political observers in Colombo say that the JVP's visit to the US embassy is a sign of a major change in its politics. In the past, the JVP which portrayed itself as arch enemy of American imperialism, shunned any link with US officials. The only known instance in the pas was in 1988 when Prins Gunasekera, a lawyer and then described as prominer JVP supporter and lawyer, was accom panied to the air port by the Political Affairs officer at Colombo's American embassy when Mr. Gunasekera fled the country.

Meanwhile, on February 19, the Supreme Court held that the 'purported expulsion' of JVP MP Nihal Galappathty from the Sri Lanka Progressive Front was invalid. Thus Mr. Galappaththy will continue as the sole representative of the SLPF in Parliament. ❑

"In the arts of peace, Man is a bungler...I know his clumsy typewriters and bungling locomotives and tedious bicycles: they are toys compared to the Maxim gun, the submarine, torpedo boat. There is nothing in Man's industrial machinery but his greed and sloth: his heart is in his weapons. This marvelous force of life which you boast is a force of Death: Man measures his strength by his destructiveness."

- George Bernard Shaw,
Man and Superman

IN BRIEF

CRACKDOWN ON ILLEGAL VIDEO PARLOURS: The Sri Lankan government is to impose heavy penalties under Emergency Regulations on illegal video parlours and jackpot centres in and around Colombo. Officials said on 13 March that the regulations have become necessary as these parlours and jackpot centres have been enticing young school girls and boys as revealed in recent police raids. In certain areas it is reported that girls and boys are paid large sums of money to participate in pornographic films.

Under the Emergency Regulations, the fine for those displaying pornographic material in video parlours or those operating jackpot centres will be fined Rs 100,000 (1,800 US dollars) or an imprisonment term extending from 2 to 10 yea- rs. The regulation also permits the confiscation and destruction of equipment found on the premises.

According to the police, already 130 persons have been arrested from 104 such places which violated these prohibitions. These include 25 video parlours and 79 jackpot centres.

MULLAITIVU BATTLE FILM : The LTTE has been showing to the public in the Vanni area under their control and abroad a film of the "Mullaitivu Battle" in which it overran a major military camp killing over 1200 troops and taking away a large quantity of weapons. In London and many western capitals, the film has been shown in cinemas hired for the occasion during weekends attended by expatriate Tamils.

In a statement issued from its London office on 19 February, the LTTE said, "Film footage of last July's Mullaitivu battle in which the LTTE overran a massive Sri Lankan military base is now available to the people of Tamil Vanni. Operation "Ceaseless Waves" is depicted here in all its military splendour from the planning stage to its actual conduct. The footage - which also shows Sri Lankan air-sea reinforcements being meticulously repelled -illustrates decisively that the LTTE is today a highly disciplined and professional army in its prime. It also makes ridiculous Sri Lanka's insistence that the LTTE is reduced or spent force. The LTTE has always been open about its military losses as well as successes. The release of such video footage to the public demonstrates an openness in military matters which contrasts sharply with the Sri Lankan government's regular concealment of military news and casualty figures from its own population."

NEW MINISTER FOR BUDDSIST AFFAIRS : The Ministry of Buddhist Affairs will soon come under the purview of Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike. At present it is under the President. This is a step that has been taken following the conflicts that have arisen between the President and senior members of the Buddhist sangha in recent months.

The resignation, in last December, of eight Chief monks from the Supreme Advisory Council of Buddhist Affairs highlighted the growing tension between the President and some leading sections of the Buddhist clergy. The relative inaccessibility of the President, sources say, was a major reason for the Buddhist prelates to feel ignored and sidelined by the present government.

LTTE RECORDS CONTINUED RISE IN MEMBERS: "Students in Tamil Vanni are gravitating to the LTTE's ranks in record numbers. Every day there arrives a stream of new recruits, with Puthukudiyir-uppu (Mullaitivu) currently generating the highest rate of new cadres. The general opinion among students seems to be that freedom has to be secured from occupying troops before any meaningful education can begin," the LTTE said in a statement on 19 February.

PEACE-WEEK IN SCHOOLS: The Ministry of Education has declared the week of March 3 - 10 as the 'Peace Week' for schools. Events organised on the initiative of the Peace Education unit of the Ministry of Education are aimed at promoting interaction and solidarity among students and school teachers of different ethnic groups.

The absence of social or personal interaction among Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim students in schools is seen by educational specialists as a major area of concern. Last year, the Minister of Education deplored the setting up of separate ethnic schools in multi-ethnic areas in the country.

Meanwhile, the President's office is considering plans to introduce peace education to the school curriculum.

JAPAN AID FOR LANKAN PROJECTS: Japan is to provide a 385.9 million US dollars loan package for six projects in Sri Lanka. Among the projects, a telecommunications network expansion project in the Colombo metropolitan area will cost 128 million US dollars. About 36.8 million US dollars will be spent to upgrade the Mahaweli system C, a multi purpose project in the North Central province. A sum of 114 million dollars will be spent for small and micro industry leadership and entrepreneur promotion in the country. To complete phase two of the Baseline project in Colombo, a sum of 28 million US dollars will be spent. The balance 79.1 million US dollars will be spent on transport and the Kalu Ganga water supply project for the Colombo region, reports from Colombo said. Last year, Japan provided some 333 million US dollars to Sri Lanka under a similar loan package.

VAVUNIYA KILLINGS: Reports of persons killed by unidentified assailants continue to come from the North. On February 21, the body of 32 year old man was found in Vavuniya. He had been shot and strangled. Two days later, Soosai Laksh- man, youth of 22, was found dead near the CWE store in Vavuniya. He had also been shot and strangled. Some reports indicate that he had been an inmate of a transit camp in Vavuniya.

Over the past year there have been several incidents of shooting, abduction and murder in and around the town of Vavuniya which have gone unsolved. This is at least partly due to the heavily militarised situation in the town with several armed Tamil groups being actively involved in policing the area, in addition to the presence of the Police and the army.

WB PROVIDES AID FOR ROADS: The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank have agreed to provide 87.72 million US dollars to Sri Lanka to help it upgrade its road network islandwide, Transport Department sources in Colombo said. The aid will be mainly to improve the country's infrastructure facilities so as to attract foreign investors. Although Sri Lanka carried out an open economy from 1977, it has failed to meet the requirements of foreign investors. Many foreign investors complained that the Sri Lanka's road network islandwide was undeveloped, the sources added. There are over 12,000 kilometres of roadway islandwide but most of them were constructed 50 years ago and required to be rehabilitated.

PADAVIYA ARMY POST ATTACKED: The LTTE in a statement issued on 5 March said, "Five Sri Lankan soldiers were killed yesterday when the LTTE simultaneously attacked an army post and a roadblock at Padaviya, east of Vavuniya. Sri Lankan troops fled from the scene without resistance leaving the dead behind. The LTTE suffered no casualties and captured rifles, pistols and other accessories. The Padaviya positions attacked were part of a string of army camps strategically placed by Sri Lanka to create a physical barrier between northern Tamil territories and eastern ones."

UK SUPPORT FOR REHABILITATION: The British Government has granted 4 million pounds sterling to support Oxfam and Save the Children Fund's (SCF) Relief and Rehabilitation Programme (RRP) in Sri Lanka, a statement from the Overseas Development Administration Division of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office said on 5 March.

This money will be used over the next four years to assist up to 200,000 people most affected by the ongoing civil conflict in Sri Lanka. The programme concentrates on meeting the needs of women, children and the most disadvantaged people in society, whatever their ethnic background. Funds will be used to reduce suffering by meeting immediate relief needs such as water and shelter, as well as providing for the longer term by helping community organisations to cope with living through conflict. RRP will assist in rebuilding basic infrastructure, improving access to health services and education and promoting agricultural production.

The programme is implemented by Oxfam & SCF with the support and co-operation of the Government of Sri Lanka, international and local aid agencies, and many community based organisations. A further contribution of ,500,000 has been agreed to

(Continued on next page)

THE TAMIL-MUSLIM DIVIDE: FACT OR FICTION?

by Sathya

The unstable Tamil-Muslim relations in Batticaloa-Ampari deteriorated further with the killing of a Muslim homeguard at Oddamavadi and retaliatory attacks against Tamil civilians by Muslim mobs. The cycle of violence reached a crescendo when mortar shells were fired into Muslim villages in the vicinity of Valaichenai from "unknown" quarters. The ICRC mediated a meeting last week, between local LTTE leaders and representatives of the Muslims, amidst much publicity. According to an ICRC press release, its main concern "were the civilian victims and would endeavour to ensure that both communities mutually understand each other and live peacefully, as they have been doing in the past".

The LTTE, in turn, issued a press release signed by "Geethan" the Political Secretary for Batticaloa-Amparai, stressing on the need for mutual trust and understanding between the Tamil and Muslim communities. While accusing "third parties" with vested interests in creating Tamil-Muslim discord, a pointed reference to the security forces, the press release went on to emphasise that anyone who turns their guns against their struggle is an enemy - irrespective of whether that person is a Sinhalese, Tamil or Muslim. The LTTE statement also called on the Muslim community to extend their unstinted support and co-operation to their struggle.

The initiative taken by ICRC in bridging the Tamil-Muslim divide and, in particular, in ensuring that civilians are not affected, is laudable. Similarly, the response from the LTTE, taken at face value, is a major step forward. However, it is not unusual in the history of ethnic relations in Sri Lanka for a step forward to be followed by two steps backwards. Hence, it is imperative that one takes a closer look into the multi-faceted nature of Tamil-Muslim relations in the Eastern Province, if the process of dialogue is to be sustained.

The traditional areas of habitation of Tamils and Muslims in the Eastern Province overlap - demographically and economically. This is particularly so in the case of Batticaloa and Amparai. Muslim and Tamil villages are in turn surrounded by Tamil and Muslim villages. Commerce as well as landlord-tenant relations in agriculture have their own ethnic identities as well as class interactions. Accord and discord, coexistence and confrontation, generally speaking, is characteristic of Tamil-Muslim relations and is part and parcel of social existence in these areas.

The common bondage, traditionally, was economic inter-dependence and linguistic ties. But this did not preclude localised areas of conflict and dispute in the sphere of commerce and tenurial relations, not to mention a heavy dose of ethnic stereo-typing stemming from cultural diversities based on religion. This was the reality then.

So how did traditional Tamil-Muslim relations, based on "conflicting unity" and symbiosis, deteriorate to the point of unleashing blood-letting and orgies of violence on each other? Was it inherent and intrinsic to Tamil-Muslim relations or was it the artificial manipulation of vested interests? In order to answer this problem, it may be necessary to take a short trek back in time.

Towards the end of the last century, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanatham claimed before the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society that the Muslims of the North-East, are, "ethnologically" Tamil. It is not the intention of this columnist to enter into this debate. Suffice it to say, today, the majority of the Muslims in the Eastern Province do not identify themselves with the concept of "Tamil-speaking people" which was advanced by the Federal party during the 50's to encompass the Muslims in the project of moulding a common Tamil identity. In fact, the TULF and other Tamil political parties, have long since ceased using the term "Tamil--speaking" and, refer, instead to the Tamil and Muslim peoples in public statements as well as in negotiations relating to the vexed issue of the unit of devolution. "Tamil-speaking" is now out of the vocabulary of Tamil nationalism. The fact that Geethan, the Political-Secretary of the LTTE in Battilitical Secretary of the LTTE in Batti-Amparai, told the Muslim representatives that necessary steps would be taken after consulting the "elders" in the adjoining Tamil villages is also indicative of LTTE's perception of the Muslims as the "other".

Equally untenable is the claim made by Lalith Athulathmudali in an address before the Razick Fareed Foundation in 1986, that for the Muslims "Tamil is the language of religion, Sinhala is the language of commerce and English is the language of education" and that the Muslims had been "treated with tolerance" by the Sinhalese. But as Quadri Ismail, a journalist cum academic, rightly pointed out "That statement can of course be disputed; but the point is in the subtext. To the Tamils who resist Sinhala hegemony, it says: accept our hegemony and we will stop trying to exterminate you. And to any Muslims who may have difficulties with continuing to accept Sinhala hegemony: if you don't, we will treat you like we have treated the Tamils. The threat, though implicit, can nevertheless be read in this passage. And helps explain why, the Muslim elite consistently feared the same Sinhala state it collaborated with" (Cited in Unmaking the Nation, p86, SSA publication, 1995).

The militarisation of the ethnic conflict, particularly following the anti-Tamil riots of 1983, witnessed the formulation of a two-pronged politico-military strategy by Colombo. Firstly, the creation of state- sponsored Sinhala settlements, comprising largely of convicts, in the Weli Oya area; and secondly, the militarisation of the Tamil- Muslim divide through the arming of Muslim in the Eastern Province.

The above brought about a violent backlash from the Tamil militant organisations. While, the main targets were the Sinhalese "border villages", there were sporadic clashes between newly formed Muslim militias, armed by the Sri Lankan security- intelligence apparatus, and the Tamil militant organisations. Since the armed combatants tended to come from the same village or area, these clashes invariably began to manifest itself in primordial loyalties. There were instances of Muslim members of Tamil militant organisations leaving and joining the Muslim militias and, inevitably, being co-opted as informants by the intelligence agencies. This further undermined mutual trust and understanding between the Tamil and Muslim communities.

The subsequent brutal attacks against worshippers in Mosques in the East and the dastardly policy of "ethnic cleansing" leading to the forced expulsion of Muslims from Jaffna and Mannar by the LTTE, following the outbreak of the Eelam war 2 in June 1990, took Tamil-Muslim relations to the edge of the volcano. Violence aside, what is relevant is that the LTTE branded the Muslims as "fifth columnist". Other Tamil militant groups, which later joined the political mainstream, were themselves not averse to perverse forms of ethnic cleansing. The perception that Muslims were collaborators was, indeed, convenient to settle festering localised conflicts and ethnic prejudices.

Coming back to last week's ICRC- me-

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support the International Committee of the Red Cross's work in Sri Lanka. This will be paid in two instalments of ,250,000, in March and July of 1997.

The total British aid to Sri Lanka in 1995/96 was ,14.6 million, of which ,6.5 million was provided through the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC).

RICHARD DE ZOYSA REMEMBERED: February 18 marked the 7th anniversary of the death of journalist Richard de Zoysa. The Working Journalists' Association held a seminar at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute, which was addressed by journalists and by D.E.W. Gunasekera, present Chairman of the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation. Another seminar was held at the Public Library, Colombo ..The Movement for Peace Freedom and Democracy organised a public meeting at Hyde Park in Colombo, which was addressed by Batty Weerakoon and journalist Sunil Madhava Prematilaka, among others. Dr. Manorani Saravanamuttu, mother of Richard de Zoysa, participated in all three events.

The ruling People's Alliance also marked February 18 with a one-page advertisement in the newspapers pointing to its human rights record and pledging 'Richard, we built the World of Human Freedom you desired. We commit ourselves to strengthening it further'.

PEACE PROCESS
THE NEED FOR A COMPLETE STAGE BY STAGE APPROACH TO END THE LANKAN ETHNIC CONFLICT

By V Ambalavanar

I. BACKGROUND

(1) Unity

We all know that the earth on which we are living is round. Therefore, if two persons travel in opposite directions, they should meet again somewhere on the earth. Many years ago, our Geography teacher explained this with the aid of a small globe. Such travel could be North to South, East to West or any different direction. Some of us may have studied this a long time ago, like me. Others may have studied this recently. Many may have forgotten about it. Others may still remember this. Why cannot those of us who live on an earth like ours find consensus from seemingly opposing viewpoints? If we could successfully achieve consensus from seemingly different positions, most of our problems could be easily resolved.

In Sri Lanka, like in many developing countries, the joint family system prevailed for a long time. In a changing world, where the young family units preferred to have greater independence so that they could have more responsibilities and authority, the joint family system started to change. The tradition of pooling all the resources together and younger family units receiving allocations from the head of the joint family for their individual needs changed gradually to accommodate greater freedom of operation for the younger families. However, the desire to get together for common benefits still remain in our family system. Thus, in the interest of family unity, we have learnt to accommodate greater freedom and flexibility of operation for individual family units. If we can successfully adopt new arrangements in our own homes, there is no reason why we cannot adopt new arrangements in running our Government.

(2)The Mandate for Peace

The Presidential elections held in November 1994 confirmed in an emphatic manner the wish of the people to end the war, bring about peace to the country through negotiation and abolish the Executive Presidential system. In the Presidential election campaign, one of most striking posters which appeared in all corners of the country was the one showing the photograph of the PA Presidential candidate with a white pigeon (symbol of peace). A vast majority of the people believed that peace was very close to being achieved and the PA was the vehicle through which it will be achieved.

The candidate of the People's Alliance polled a total of 4,709,205 votes as against 2,715,283 votes polled by the candidate of the United National party. The other four candidates put together did not poll even 151,706 which is the number of invalid votes. In terms of percentages, the candidate of the PA polled 62,28% as against 35.91% polled by the UNP Candidate. The mandate for peace was thus very clear. Further, it was also noted that 96.35% of those who voted in the Jaffna district voted for peace symbol. Similar high percentages were witnessed in the districts of Batticaloa (87.30%), Vanni (85.30%), Digamadulla (72.36%), Trincomalee (71.62%), Colombo (64.82%), Gampaha (64.74%) and so on. This provides a clear indication that the national minority communities looked up to the People's Alliance to bring about peace to the country through negotiation.

The LTTE did not seek the votes of the people, especially the Tamils and the Muslims. In 1994, the people rejected the previous Government which continued the war without achieving peace. Hence, it is the responsibility of the Government to bring about peace through negotiation. The people did not give a mandate to blame others and intensify the war. This should be clearly understood by the Government and others.

(3) Need for Changes in the Form of Government

The population of Sri Lanka was around 8 million when we got independence about half a century ago. The present population is more than two times that figure. Our Gross Domestic Product has increased more than a hundred times during this period. Recurrent and capital expenditures of the Government have shown increases similar to that witnessed in the case of the Gross Domestic Product. Such changes in the several activities and sectors where the people and the Government have to interact mean that we also need to have a form of Government that will facilitate close interaction. hence, there clearly exists a need to create major Government focal points away from the centre.

In the above background, the creation of Governmental institutions at the Provincial Council's system have put forward two major arguments against it.

The first one has really emerged from the way the system got introduced as an alternative to separation. It is unfortunate that a system that could have been easily justified on the basis of catering to the need for a Government closer to the people got introduced in the above manner, and thus was branded as a move towards separation by those who fail to understand the need for such a system in a changing situation.

The second major argument against the Provincial Councils is based on costs. The origins of this reasoning are difficult to trace. However, if we note that the Provincial Councils are institutions which cut across the line of authority from the centre that a sizable section of the central political and administrative authorities have been unhappy about, then it will not be difficult to understand the problem better. An explanation for the unhappiness with the Provincial Councils stems from the uncomfortable situation of lack of sufficient authority which many top political and administrators at the centre have to face. Rectification of such situations calls for either duplication of staff and infrastructure which adds to the costs or the creation of positions in the Provinces, Districts and Divisions, the holders of which are subject to dual control by the centre and the Provinces.

Now that the opposition has come in these forms, it will be desirable to take note of them and work out a basis on which they could be countered. Devolution which places the responsibilities and authorities in a more compatible manner in the Provinces or Regions not only brings Governmental centres closer to the people but also eases the pressures of the type referred to at the centre.

Even at the centre, people's wishes were carried out in a shared manner by the Parliament and the Senate during the first two decades after independence. The first move towards concentration of political power at the centre took place during the period 1970-1977 when the Senate was abolished. Further concentration of power at the centre, this time in the hands of the Executive President, took place in 1978. As stated earlier, the PA promised to abolish the Executive Presidential system. While considering changes to the Executive Presidential system, it is therefore relevant to bring to focus the need for a second chamber like the Senate, though different in composition,

to ensure that the Parliament itself will not become a body where power is over-concentrated. If such a change takes place, the people will have the Senators, as a second set of representatives, to act as a counterweight whenever Parliament tends to become too authoritarian.

(4) Attitudes of Political parties

Despite the initial objections, the political parties have gradually accepted the changes introduced to take the Government closer to the people. For example, the Sri Lanka Freedom party which originally opposed the Provincial Council's System has since accepted the system. We are also witnessing situations where the Government Party at the centre and the controlling party at the Provincial Council turn out to be different. The party rivalry and the confrontation attitudes developing from time to time between the centre and the provinces have brought to focus the need for more clarity in terms of powers as well as subjects.

The most vociferous opponents of the Provincial Councils are the smaller parties among the majority community, and certain individuals from the same community holding narrow nationalistic views. Opposition to the system also comes from certain sections of the clergy who feel threatened in the changed situation. Similar attitudes could be seen among certain professional groups, who, like sections of the clergy, feel threatened.

As regards provision of more mechanisms for exercising people's wishes at the centre, the PA is for the abolition of the Executive Presidential system. However, the sense of urgency pledged during the election campaigns of 1994 does not appear to be evident now. The second chamber similar to the Senate does not appear to have much support among the parties represented in the Parliament except the parties of the national minorities.

II DEVOLUTION

(1)Weaknesses of Decentralisation

Reference was made to taking Government closer to the people and the Provincial Councils in the earlier section. The attempt to take the Government closer to the people through the Provincial Councils and the Divisional Secretariats could be best described as decentralisation efforts. The Governments which introduced and operated them during the initial seven years, in fact believed in a centralised system through a Presidential form of Government. It is therefore, not surprising that the exercises took the form of decentralisation and not devolution.

All those who are against the Presidential System should also realise that the real need at the moment is not only a shift away from the Presidential System but also a move away from the Colombo based centralised structure. The two major youth insurgencies witnessed in the South of Sri Lanka during the last twenty five years provide enough evidence of this. The unfortunate experiences of the District Councils of the early eighties, the North-East Provincial Council and the Southern Provincial Council under the previous Government and the North Central Provincial Council and the Sabara gamuwa Provincial Council under the present Government clearly bring out the weaknesses of the decentralised arrangements introduced through the Provincial Council's System. Even some of the major problems faced by Members of Parliament with the Decentralised Budget over the long period it has been in operation, could be largely attributed to the weaknesses of the decentralisation process itself.

(2)The Devolution Package of the Gov ernment

The present Government announced the devolution package in August 1995 as a move to solve the Ethnic problem. From the time it was announced, numerous comments on the details of the package have appeared in the media. It has also been discussed in detail in several meetings. However, there is one striking feature which is worth noting. Certain sections of the majority community have looked at the package as an alternative to separation and hence many of their contributions viewed the package with suspicion.

When the Government announced the legal draft in January 1996, it was therefore, not surprising to find a watered down package going before the parliamentary Select Committee. The Tamil political parties which supported the package appear to be living in hope that the Select Committee process could be utilised to reverse some of the changes made in the revised legal document. The United National Party has maintained the position that it will make its views known in the Select Committee to help evolve devolution of power.

Under the background described above, if the political parties wish to make significant progress on devolution through the revised package, an attitudinal change is necessary concerning the package. All concerned should in the first instance, be made to view the package objectively as a devolution package. If the devolution process could be utilised to solve the Ethnic problem then we should be happy about it and try to look for those elements and features that will help in the resolution of the Ethnic problem. To the extent that the Tamils are anxious to have a meaningful devolution package in position, the approval and implementation of a devolution package will help to achieve unity in diversity.

III UNITS OF DEVOLUTION

(1)The Present Position

Ironically, the devolution package and the revised legal document have not defined the units of devolution. It may be noted that the way the subject has been approached to date has contributed to this sad situation. An objective analysis is necessary to help arrive at a consensus. Under the Thirteenth Amendment to the present Constitution, nine Provincial Units have been defined. The merger of the North and East has been brought about by the late President J R Jayawardena using powers under the Emergency Regulations. We all know that this merger has continued during the time of the late President R Premadasa and D B Wijehunge, his successor. Even after more than two years of the new Government's term of office, the merger is stil remaining. Up to now, the merger has thus been in effect for over nine years.

(2) Larger Units Than Provinces

There appear to be misgivings among certain sections of the majority Sinhalese community that devolving powers to Provincial, Regional or other units will pave the way for separation. If this fear is not to be aggravated, the definition of new units of devolution should be such as to convince them that the creation of larger units than the existing Provinces is in fact a uniting process. This will become acceptable if the resolution of the North-East problem in this process will also allay fears of separation.

(3)The Different Views on the Merger of the North and East

Several different views on this matter have been widely discussed for many years in the past. A careful examination of the arguments for and against the merger brings out the contrasting views held by leaders of the majority and minority communities. The majority of Sinhalese leaders have been opposed to the merger. The Tamil leaders have been of the firm view that the merger should be left undisturbed. The Muslim leaders have been insisting that Muslim identity should be preserved and their rights, safety and security guaranteed.

(4)The Position Taken by the Government and Others

In the Election Manifesto and in the Package of August 1995, the People's Alliance Government has indicated that boundaries of the North-East Province will be adjusted to resolve the 'merger' issue The Tamil politicians and intelligentsia have been consistently insisting that the Northern and Eastern Provinces where Tamils have been living for generations should remain merged in any solution to the ethnic problem. The present Muslim leadership has been insisting that the Muslims should be provided with a sepa-

rate region. The Government has now left the matter to the Select Committee in Parliament to decide how the issue is to be resolved.

(5) Promotion of Unity and the Relevance of Larger Regions

In the above background, if national unity is to be promoted then the desirable thing to do is to create larger and multi-ethnic Regional Units in place of the existing Provincial Units and make them work properly and effectively. The ordinary people should also be properly informed by the leaders that the attempted system is to move away from the Provincial Units and create multi-ethnic Regional Units. In order to achieve this, the proposed package should contain provisions for the merger of two or more Provinces. Initial mergers could be Western- Southern, Northern-Eastern, North Central-North Western, and Central-Sabaragamuwa-Uva. While attempting to do this, it will not be prudent to waste time with major changes of Provincial boundaries (certainly not changes on ethnic basis). The creation of such multi-ethnic regions and the proper functioning of Regional Units will gradually make people realise that we are all children of the same motherland.

We must realise that we should strive for unity in diversity under the present circumstances. The successful resolution of the several issues also depends on our patience and tolerance. As time passes by and when wounds are healed, there will be possibilities of further mergers as the country is put on the accelerated development path. We should learn from the emerging trends in the World in the form of unions of countries belonging to regions for common benefits. The success of the above approach depends particularly on the leaders of the majority community.

(6) The Case of the North and East

If we are to look for consensus and work towards unity and reduction of overhead costs, then we should go for 'Regional Units' which are greater than or equal in size to the corresponding 'Provincial Units'. In what follows, some options are discussed briefly, keeping the objectives of consensus, unity and costs as overriding criteria. Since the Regions other than the North-East Region have not generated much controversy, the options are confined to some possibilities in the North-East Region. This has been developed to inform the Sinhalese Public in particular that the merger of the North and East is not as bad as many Sinhalese leaders make it out to be. On the contrary, if the Sinhalese wish to preserve unity, they should promote the merger and work for the success of a multi-ethnic North-East Regional Unit instead of looking out for other options which will lead to divisive tendencies. Certainly a Tamil majority North-East Regional Unit is also far better than the prolonged violent conflict.

(a) Continuation of the Present Temporary Merger as a Permanent

Tamils including ex-militants and militants are asking for this as a viable alternative to separation. If implemented, it will reduce militancy to a great extent. In a multi-ethnic Regional Unit such as this, it will be almost impossible for the Regional Unit to either pave the way for separation or organise armed struggle without the notice of the centre. Overhead costs such as duplication of establishment costs would be kept to a minimum.

(b) Continuation of the Merger After Excising Ampara Electorate and Attaching it to Uva arid attaching" it to Uva

There may be pressures from others to either make similar arrangements and/or create separate units for other minority groups. (eg Sinhalese elsewhere in the North-East and Muslims as well as the plantation Tamils).

(c) Adopting Option (b) with a Further Modification to Create a South-East Region for the Muslims

Chances of consensus will decrease. Fragmentation on ethnic basis will increase. There will be more pressures for ethnic based units elsewhere in the country also. Overhead costs will increase.

(d) Separate Regions for the North and Fast

Fragmentation on ethnic basis will increase. Besides the predominantly Tamil Unit in the North there is likely to be agitation for two more Units in the East dominated by Tamil speaking representatives. Consensus is difficult to achieve resulting in increased separatist tendencies. Overhead costs will be higher than those under Option (a).

Considering the above, it is clear that Option (a) is the best one which will not only achieve 'Unity in Diversity' but also pave the way for greater co-operation and understanding among communities who will be living in multi-ethnic environments. Groups which advocate this will find it difficult to make the same mistakes which they claim the centre has been making over the years. By agreeing to the merger, the Muslims will not only gain the goodwill of the Tamils but also pave the way for enhanced pressures by them in the second stage referred to below. This pressure could be exerted at the Centre and the Region simultaneously to secure proper arrangements that will help maintain their identity. The efforts of the entire country could change to constructive rather than destructive efforts as prevailing in parts of the country at present.

From the point of view of all three major communities, a merged North-East will mean that the united decision of their Assembly will have greater chances of acceptance by the centre. A single community cannot have dominance over others because of the combined strength of the other two. Through the process, the dominance of militant groups will also recede because such groups will have little to quarrel about. The threat of central intervention rather than actual intervention will be a deterrent to any serious violations of law and order.

IV A TWO STAGE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS ON DEVOLUTION AND RELATED MATTERS

(1) The Process Which Reflects the Principles of Devolution

It could be reckoned that the present devolution package that is before the Select Committee of Parliament is one which has been prepared mainly at central level. We could consider this to be Stage 1. After obtaining the necessary approval by Parliament,

Regional Units which are greater than or equal in size to the corresponding Provincial Units could be set up and allowed to function for one or two terms.

While ensuring the above, Stage 2 in the decision-making process should be set in motion where the respective Regional Units are given the opportunity to prepare detailed reports about the way their Units should function to cater to the Region's aspirations and needs. Such reports should be submitted to the Devolution Commission, the details about which are given in a later section of this paper. After discussing these reports, a consensus could be arrived at to cater for the aspirations and needs of the Regions with reference to changes that are necessary to the Devolution Package as well as the unit or units of devolution. The Devolution Commission should examine the reports in detail and report to Parliament about the improvements to the devolution package. While going through this process, the specialities of individual Units should also be adequately looked after. The reporting process should adhere to previously agreed schedules. Parliament should examine in detail all these reports and make final decisions to complete Stage 2.

By this process a solution which is satisfactory from the point of view of the Centre as well as the Regions could be achieved. If necessary, the process could be confined to only certain thorny issues. During this five or ten years, the wounds of the past are likely to disappear as the country progresses on the development path. In this manner, there is room for further changes through Stage 3, Stage 4 etc. to suit the circumstances.

Having taken note of the relevance of devolution for Sri Lanka to cater to the increases in population and production and

the expansion of Government activities as well as the growing discontent in the South with the centralised structure based in Colombo, we have suggested the appropriate units of devolution and the stage by stage approach that may be adopted to bring about the changes to accommodate the Regional aspirations more explicitly in the decision-making process on devolution. It is now useful to discuss in some detail the relevance of what has been said so far, to the peace process itself and see what additional steps are needed to help the process. Since we are a country where four major religions guide our individual and collective thinking and actions, let us dwell a little on what the religions say.

V EXPENSES AND DESTRUCTION

(1) Violence and Religions

Violence hurts and sometimes kills people. It also leads to loss of property. When violent means are adopted to solve problems it leads to more and more violence. The end result is misery to not only the victims of violence but also to those who resort to violence and several others who are totally unconnected with the process adopted to solve the problems.

History tells us that Emperor Asoka conquered Kalinga with the might of his army despite the advice of the Buddhist clergy that the war would only lead to misery and therefore should not be fought. At the end of the war he saw for himself the horrors of the war. He went through the experience of witnessing the mother of a dead soldier preferring to die of thirst rather than drinking the water provided by the Emperor whose hands were soiled. Moved by this shocking experience the Emperor embraced Buddhism to serve mankind.

Hindus are knowledgeable about the Malabharatha which was shown in the year 1995 over a popular TV channel every week. Yuthishthira asked Lord Krishna to request Dhuryodana to provide at least five houses for him and the brothers to live peacefully. Dhuryodana refused to concede even this request. The resulting war led to the destruction of not only the Gouravas but also everyone else of significance even on the side of the Pandavas, except the five brothers. This was witnessed by us in the weekly program referred to above.

Sri Lanka was fortunate to receive Emperor Asoka's son Mahinda and daughter Sangamitha as emissaries through whom the majority of the people became Buddhists. The other major religions followed by the people of this country are Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. The fundamentals of all these religions are against violence and war as a means to solve problems. Yet we have found ourselves in the midst of a war-like situation during the last thirteen and a half years. The vast majority of us who follow the ideals preached by one or the other of the religions referred to above have also been caught up in this mess with no end in sight.

The questions that we should ask ourselves at this stage are, "Have we been following the ideals preached by our respective religions during these thirteen and a half years? If not, what are the costs of not following them? Are we close to the situation faced by Emperor Asoka after the war on Kalinga or are we closer to a situation like the aftermath of the Mahabharatha war?" These questions prompt us to turn our attention to the costs aspect which also will have a bearing on the discussion in the rest of this paper.

(2) Loss of Life

It has been estimated that the violent conflict has resulted in the loss of over 60,000 lives. This is approximately 5,000 lives per year up to 1994. Since then, we have witnessed some of the bloodiest confrontations in this thirteen and a half year history of violent conflict. Our per capita income is about US $ 600 or Rs. 35,000 per annum. Through the loss of 60,000 persons, we have to date lost at least Rs. 2.1 Billion worth of earning capacity per year. If we continue to lose persons at the rate of 5,000 per year, there will be an additional loss of at least Rs 175 Million worth of earning capacity every year which cumulates over time. For the nearest and dearest, the loss of 60,000 persons to date and an estimated loss of at least 5,000 more persons per year because of the violent conflict will be many times the figure quoted above. The loss is simply incalculable in money terms. In addition there are persons who are partially and permanently disabled as a result of the conflict with consequent loss of earning capacity.

(3) Expenses on War-Like Activities

Our defence expenditure through the Government Budget has been about Rs. 25 Billion per year during recent years up to 1994. Since then it has shot up to about Rs. 50 Billion per year. There are also militant and ex-militant groups who spend money on arms, etc. If the annual expenditure by such groups, which can never be estimated with any certainty, is reckoned to be half as that spent through the Government Budget, we find about an additional Rs. 12.5 Billion worth of the country's resources going to meet expenses on war-like activities every year. Since 1994 this could have gone up to much higher levels.

(4) Relief, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation

The Government also spends over Rs. 10 Billion every year on relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation. Relatives and friends of the affected people as well as Non-Governmental Organisations also spend on relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation. The extent is again not easily quantifiable. The contribution of the Non-Governmental Organisations is known to be very high. Considering the further fact that we still have joint family connections and the vast majority of relatives as well as friends are very considerate in helping their nearest and dearest when in need, the resources spent on relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation outside the Government system could be reckoned as at least a further amount of over Rs. 10 Billion per annum. Since 1994, this would have gone up considerably.

(5) Foregone Economic Benefits and Potential Dangers in the Future

Restrictions imposed on economic activities such as fishing, farming, transport, industry, etc. and the destruction of productive resources in the affected areas and elsewhere in the country lead to loss of production and income. Even if this is placed at a modest figure of 5% of the national product, the resulting figure is over Rs. 2.5 Billion. The military hardware and ammunition which are being purchased by both sides are being used for destructive purposes in the North and East. Even long after peace is achieved, if we manage to do so, thousands of unexploded bombs, mines and the like are going to remain in the North and East hidden under the soil and in all corners of the areas which are being used as hide-outs by the combatants. They, as well as the youth who have been used to the gun culture as a way of life over several years are going to be a potential source of destruction for the people who have to live in such areas in the future.

(6) Liberation

It is often claimed that these violent confrontations are inevitable where non-violent methods have been frustrated. As noted earlier, about 60,000 persons have died so far as a result of the violence. In addition, Lakhs of people have been displaced. Recent flow of information from areas like Jaffna which are claimed to have been liberated by the Government Security Forces indicate that the violence inflicted on the people by the Security Forces has been on the increase over time. The liberation that comes out of all this violence include 'liberation of the soul from the body', 'liberation of the limbs from the body', 'liberation from property and other belongings', 'liberation from day to day food', 'liberation from education, jobs and culture', 'liberation from family ties and relatives', etc. We should not forget the quantum of resources needed to rectify the adverse effects of such 'liberation' resulting from violence. For how long can the country afford to divert valu-

(Continued on next page)

THE MORALLY CENTRED SOCIETY

By Dr R Sivamohan

The other day I told a knowledgable person, "You Know, Marx has said that materialism, in practice, economics, is the basis of everything".

To that he replied "Jesus has said that you shall not live by bread alone." There is a lot of meaning in my friend's reply.

An understanding of the meaning of this friend's reply should enable one to compare and contrast a society centred around technology with a society centred around morals.

Fully developed societies centred around technology are found in the west. As Mr Gorbatjev recently said at the UN these societies have run their course. It has come to an end. It has shown that it can support only one third of its population - it can give prosperity to only one third of its population. There is a need in the west therefore to think of alternatives. Mr Gorbatjev also stressed the need to build societies centred around morals and ethics.

Other desirable characteristics of the society centred around morals should be that this society permits recycling of its resources, enables lifelong education and shows permissiveness. As Bertrand Russell said a society must be where persuasion through arguments, not propaganda, is adopted as the means of convincing. It must also be a society where observation and induction, not intuition, are encouraged.

In many of the developing countries,

(Continued from page 14)

able resources towards destructive purposes?

(7) Turning Point

The sooner those who are engaged in violence or promote it, and those who directly or indirectly help such violence realise its damaging and counter productive consequences, and do away with them as a means to solve problems the faster will a solution to the ethnic problem and consequent development of the country be achieved. If the people and their leaders examine matters such as those referred to above and understand the benefits of meaningful devolution of powers, then unity in diversity will be achieved and become a major turning point in our search for a solution to the ethnic problem.

(To be continued in next issue)

"the story of the human history is reduced to its essentials; as a result, it revolves around the basic requirements for life". In such countries, a morally centred society should ensure that there is a high life expectancy, a high literacy rate, a low infant mortality rate and a high calorie intake. Education, adequate health care, adequate food and shelter should be entrenched in the fundamental rights of the individuals.

Marx wanted to eliminate all occupational stereotypes. Each human is to pursue not any one occupation; he is to involve himself in many areas. He wanted human to become the fully developed individual.

Schizophrenia is a psychological sickness one can get in the capitalist society where he is so thoroughly alienated from his real nature. Schizophrenia is a state which gives a twisted reality. Long periods of suffering with deep worries, difficulties with concentration and difficulties with rest lead to Schizophrenia. Abstracted men from humanity, his struggle to understand the meaning of work under capitalism are the causes for this suffering. Man shall not be a prisoner of anything; he shall be free and be engaged in a variety of activities and thereby feel young.

As a well known social scientist has said the meaning of freedom should be that man makes no unconditional commitments to any organisation. All loyalties to movements or organisations, parties or States, are conditional upon his own principles and conscience.

Professor Mills, from Columbia, writes that Marx believed in human reason and therefore in freedom as one of its conditions and consequences.

Einstein has discussed the meaning of freedom in a remarkable way. He says that one should not only have the freedom to maintain a long life and good health but also have the freedom to develop his spiritual powers such as intellectual and artistic powers. Advances in sciences help to maintain a long life and good health. Freedom of expression and instruction or freedom of communication is essential here to spread the advances achieved in sciences in order to improve the physical quality of man.

To develop the intellectual and artistic powers one needs free time. One cannot work all his awakened time just to find food and other basic necessities of life. Advances made in technology should provide the man with adequate free time so that he can develop his artistic and intellectual powers. A 6-hour working day is something worth the working class fighting for.

Einstein says that in addition to the above-mentioned freedoms one should also have inward freedom. That is one should be spiritually liberated. Originality in thoughts characterised by the independence of thoughts that are free from authoritarian and social prejudices is of paramount importance. Unphilosophical routinising and habit should reflect in ones thought.

Another evil of capitalism is sexism. The sexism and the use of it in consumer industry through advertisements should be abolished. The advertisements exploit the woman's body to sell things. One good example is the car industry. Cars are often associated with beautiful women in the advertisements. Beautiful women in minimal clothing standing in sexist postures behind glittering products is common in many advertisements.

It is not to say that the advertisements are bad. The advertisements should be both true and arouse curiosity. Moreover they should be informative. The sexist use of a woman's body in advertisements is degrading, especially to women. A woman's body is not any of a businessman's business.

The advertising industry leads the young females to get the idea that the purpose of being a woman is fulfilled by just being an object and a surface. Capitalism which is fundamentally a surface based method tries to capitalise on a woman's body by portraying it as just a surface. Such attitudes finding roots in the minds of the young women, can scarcely be a means of liberating the women from male domination.

Can we have a fully developed morally centred society in this world? Will the capitalists and those who misuse the power permit it? Even the sections of the hierarchical priesthood are after power. Can we achieve a fully developed morally centred society in this world without a radical change in the social structure?

It is for example possible to revolutionise a University against the inconsiderate and power hungry Dean and his few followers. The students of that University can be made to understand the real natures of the Dean and his followers.

Leon Trotsky illustrates this task of bringing about a radical change in the social structure with the interference of the midwife in labour pains.

Leon Trotsky also writes that a radical change in the social structure takes place only when there is no other way out. The masses advance and retreat several times before they make up their minds to the final assault. ●

THE CHOICE IS BETWEEN NEGOTIATED SOLUTION OR UNENDING WAR

By Dr. S. Narapalasingam

Whether by coincidence or design, the two articles in the TT of February 1997, the first written by K.A.Anandan of the USA, and the second by Devanesan Nesiah constitute a debate the former has called for on "The Choice for Tamils" in the present situation. Devanesan Nesiah's "Crisis in Sri Lanka : Is there a Way Out?" would appear to provide the realistic choice for the Lankan Tamils.

In joining this debate, the aim is to make the point quite explicit by relating the suggestions made by DN to the various concerns raised by KAA, which inter alia focus on the inadequacy of the draft devolution proposals of the Government, the collaboration with the government of the Tamil parties committed to a peaceful resolution of the ethnic conflict, while the LTTE is engaged in a war against it and the presumed isolation of the latter in a political settlement of the conflict.

The opportunity is also taken to present the view on the two opposite approaches indicated by KAA and DN. The former wants the Tamils not to support the devolution proposals of the Government, while the latter emphasises the importance of obtaining the approval of all parties, including the UNP even though this may require initially to settle for a devolution scheme less in scope than presented in August 1995 by the Government. As a senior civil servant who has been in charge of civil administration at the central and provincial levels, he has no doubt taken a cautious and pragmatic view emphasising the importance of an effective implementation strategy in a negotiated settlement of the conflict. In the negotiation process, he thinks that the emphasis should be more on a broad consensus among all the major parties including the LTTE and their commitment to effective implementation of the widely agreed proposals than on the superficial extension in the scope of devolution.

Government's Proposals

KAA has drawn attention to the analysis of the Government's devolution proposals contained in a document published by the Tamil Information Centre in London and has concluded that these do not meet the aspirations of the Tamils. The TIC's publication, *"SRI LANKA: Devolution Proposals - August 1995 and January 1996, A summary of the Government's devolution proposals and implications for the minority communities"*, known to have been authored by a well known Tamil university don who was on a visit to London, inter alia, deals with Tamil concerns from the standpoint of the implied dependency of the regions on the centre for personal security, security of property, higher education, resource exploitation, development and implementation of the proposals. The likelihood of continuous presence of the army dominated by the Sinhalese in the North-East region is one of the major objection identified in this document.

The complete lack of trust is evident from the many comments seen in the analysis contained in the TIC document. Resolution of ethnic conflicts without compromising the unity and integrity of states requires mutual trust between the different groups. If one group is not prepared to trust the other, a negotiated settlement of the conflict without outside pressure is impossible. Even if external force is applied to bring about a settlement, it will not last very long. While the fears expressed about the effective implementation of the devolution proposals are genuine, the conclusion that the package "has been deliberately designed for campaign purposes of the Sri Lankan government to convince the international community that the government is magnanimous and that the Tamils are unreasonable" is indicative of the negative attitude towards a negotiated settlement of the conflict. Without discussing the issues raised by the TIC with the Government, such a firm conclusion only reflects the mistrust and prejudice of the rejectors. In sum, the latter wants complete autonomy for the North-East region - virtual separation. DN has responded to such an aim as unattainable, "since it is inconceivable that the government of Sri Lanka will ever consider division of the country as an option." It is also unrealistic to assume that external intervention will be forthcoming to coerce Sri Lankan government to concede to the demand of such a division of the island.

India has made its position very clear on this matter and in fact from its own interest would prefer a federal system not very dissimilar to its own. Despite the rhetoric of some Tamil ultra-nationalistic groups and individuals in Tamil Nadu, there is no prospect of the State government, even if it wanted to, directly intervening in the conflict of Sri Lanka. In the context of the historical memories of south Indian invasions of the island in the distant past, even the mere expressions of support to Sri Lankan Tamils by the Tamil parties and leaders in South India have only served to deepen the distrust of the Sinhalese with regard to the aspirations of the Lankan Tamils. The siege mentality of many Sinhalese gets reinforced by any visible ties with the Tamils in South India.

Tamil analysts have failed to recognise the difficulties the Sinhalese leaders face in using politically sensitive words and phrases in a devolution scheme, albeit the result of chauvinistic politics of past governments. For example, the TIC document accuses the Government for its reluctance "to call the Regional Arrangement as Regional Government." What is important for the vast majority of the Tamil people living in the North-East region of Sri Lanka (not those expatriate Tamils living comfortably in the West) is the substance contained in the devolution package and the guarantee of implementation and not the nomenclature used to describe it.

If the conflict is to be resolved through a negotiation process as indicated by Nesiah, then it is imperative that Tamil leaders and others too, who are interested in liberating the suffering people from their miseries in the short and longer terms, understand the concerns and difficulties of those Sinhalese leaders whose participation in it is vital to a solution. There has been a lot of argument over the politicised words and phrases used by both sides and the avoidance of an emphasis on semantics rather than substance would certainly facilitate a negotiated settlement.

It is very unfortunate that some Sinhalese intellectuals have joined forces with Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists and set up a private commission of inquiry to identify the grievances of the Sinhalese fo over 200 years and recommend remedial measures at this juncture. There cannot be any doubt that this commission has been set up at this point in time with the primary purpose of undermining the government's devolution proposals. The real enemies of peace are those who incite communal hatred and encourage other

fellow members of their community to fight by exhibiting their fervour for narrow nationalism through inflammatory utterances and acts without putting their own lives as well as of their family members at risk.

DN is quite forthright in stating that "the only alternative to a negotiated settlement is continued violence with indefinitely prolonged and increasing suffering." Any negotiation has to be for devolving powers to the people in a manner that addresses their main concerns and gives confidence for a secure and better future in Sri Lanka. Those who reject this proposition are condemning the unfortunate people remaining in the North-East, who have suffered enough to be the sacrificial lambs. KAA's view to reject outright the devolution proposals without considering the consequences of this action for the afflicted people in the North-East (not the expatriate Tamils) is like prescribing a drug to cure a patient without knowing its side effects over the long term, let alone its effectiveness in the treatment.

Responsible leaders know that giving up even long cherished goals at a given historical conjuncture do not mean surrendering completely the legitimate rights of their community they profess to lead. The then leaders of the DMK in Madras did not think so when they gave up their agitation for an independent Tamil state. KAA and others with similar views need to be reminded of the consequences of the stand taken by the then Tamil leaders on the eve of Sri Lanka's independence insisting on not less than the "fifty-fifty formula" for sharing power. The fact that Arafat the acknowledged leader of the Palestinians entered into the peace process with Israel through the Oslo accord does not mean that he has betrayed the cause of his people though he may be accused of doing so by those extremists who, like Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice may demand the pound of flesh without even having the hope of obtaining an ounce of it.

Collaboration with the Govt

KAA laments: "President Chandrika Kumaratunga clearly intends to finalise these proposals for approval by Parliament and a national referendum in the next few months. In this effort she wants to get the support first of the Colombo-based Tamil parties represented in Parliament and later of Tamil voters in a national referendum." He has also given five reasons why "a number of Tamils, apparently including the Tamil parties in Colombo, who believe, in varying degrees, that the President should be supported." According to his judgement these are unsound and concludes, "any possible benefit to the Tamils from supporting the Government's strategy would be limited and transient at best and the pain and suffering of the Tamils will not ease because the war will continue."

KAA thinks that the leaders of the "Colombo-based Tamil parties" are only interested in finding a political role for themselves and hence they are collaborating with the Government! He warns "that the Sinhalese leadership will give them little political space and resources once they have used them for the purpose of claiming legitimacy internally and internationally." The leader of the CWC Mr.S.Thondaman was able to get political space and resources for the hill country Tamils through collaboration with the past and present governments. He used both the power of his trade union and his political skill to raise the economic condition of the people from the deplorable level they had lived for decades in sovereign Sri Lanka. They may have to travel a long distance to get any where near the living standards of other communities but even the progress achieved so far (certainly not transient) would not have been possible through other means. Confrontational politics with all Tamils joining forces on one side, giving rise to the perception that they are opposed to any and every government in Colombo has proved ineffectual and foolhardy.

All the Tamil parties represented in Parliament (including other groups that have given up the armed struggle) have not objected to the LTTE negotiating with the Government and reaching a settlement that will enable the Tamil people to live without fear of losing their lives and property and prosper without any discriminations and inhibitions imposed directly or indirectly by the central government. In fact most of these Tamil groups have publicly expressed the view that that the LTTE should be brought into the negotiating process to achieve peace. Even the UNP wants the LTTE to enter the negotiation process. But it is the LTTE claiming to be the sole representative of the entire Tamil people that wants to exclude all Tamil groups and all the others from any negotiation, political and even humanitarian work in the North-East.

What KAA advocates is direct confrontation with the government by all the Tamil parties, the consequences of such a short-sighted strategy have not been considered. The UNP's stand on the government's devolution proposals are well known. A change of government that brings the UNP back to power is not going to pave the way for separation or for any improvement in the content of the devolution package. Co-operation of some Tamil parties with the Government has helped in many ways to win the sympathy of the Sinhalese people and broad-minded Sinhalese leaders. This is important in the short term to reach a negotiated settlement and over the long term for the peaceful co-existence of the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities in Sri Lanka.

Colombo-basedTamil Parties

KAA has used the phrase "Colombo-based Tamil parties" to stress that they do not support the LTTE in its confrontation with the Government to achieve its goal. Surely he cannot expect any Tamil group that is threatened with physical extermination to support the LTTE. In the politics of the LTTE, there is no room for any other Tamil group or party which has a different idea as to the solution to the ethnic conflict. Even before the other Tamil groups gave up militancy as a political we apon, they were being eliminated phys cally in the north-east. That is why many of these groups became "Colombo-based". It is immaterial where a group is based, as long as it can contribute to bring about a peaceful settlement and put an end to the killings and suffering of the people. If Tamil individuals and groups living in comfort in western countries can pontificate as to what the solution to the problem facing the Tamils should be, the "Colombo-based Tamil parties" should have a better and more legitimate claim to do so.

None of the non-LTTE Tamil groups has claimed that it alone has the sole right to "liberate" the Tamils. Nor any group is unconcerned about the plight of the Tamils. In fact, all of them want to see an early end to the suffering of the Tamils in the North-East. Anyone following closely the events in Sri Lanka knows the contribution made by some of the Tamil members of Parliament in drawing the attention of the government and the world at large to specific cases of misconduct by the army and the suffering of the people living in the North-East, under the intolerable conditions created by both sides. They may not have achieved the desired degree of success in alleviating the suffering of the people, but without them the situation would have been far worse.

DN has stated that in resolving ethnic conflicts, negotiating with a minority ethnic militant group need not imply recognising it as the sole representative of the ethnic group concerned. It should be left to the people in the North-East to decide freely who should represent them in the elected regional and national assemblies. The presumption that one-party rule is best for the people in the North-East has no legitimacy at the present time. The people so far did not have the opportunity to express freely their decision on this vital question. Nor can any of the "Colombo- based Tamil parties" claim that it represents the majority of the people in the North-East. The point that should not be missed here is that the group whose support is critical to any settlement cannot claim that other organised groups must renounce any right to serve the people either during the negotiation process or after reaching a settlement. It is, of course, a different matter if any group obstructs the process merely to deny any

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role for others and to assure its authority over others.

Third-party Facilitation

KAA wants the readers of the TT and others to request the leaders of the "Colombo-based Tamil parties" to support the call of people like Dr.Kumar Rupesinghe, "first for an end to the isolation of the north from the south and the restoration of free humanitarian access to food, medicines and other essential supplies, to be followed by an abatement in the level of conflict and by resumption of negotiations between the Government and the LTTE with third-party mediation or facilitation." It is strange for KAA to presume that the leaders of these parties are so insensitive to the plight of the Tamils that they need to be pushed to alleviate the suffering of the Tamil people in the North-East. At least he has recognised that they can perform a useful role in bringing about an end to the human loss and suffering and not to isolate the north from the south.

However, he has not thought it necessary to request the LTTE leadership to create an environment to facilitate "an end to the isolation of the north from the south and the restoration of free humanitarian access to food, medicines and other essential supplies" without surrendering and to start negotiating with the government. (The approach proposed by DN requires the participation of the UNP and other groups in the negotiation process.) There is a credibility problem here as not only the government but also the international community has blamed the LTTE for breaking the peace talks unilaterally and resuming the war in April 1995. The peace effort was not given an adequate chance and certainly not in terms of the gradual and steady progress sought through the process envisaged by DN. The sincerity of the government in restoring the conditions mentioned by KAA can be put to the test, if a cease-fire is declared and observed. This is what is needed from both sides in the first instance. In an interview with Lakshman Gunasekara (TT of January 1997), Dr. Rupesinghe has stated that "it is important for both sides to remember that it is civilians who must sustain the society which both sides are claiming to protect. Thus, the more you involve civilians in the war, the more you lose the war. The impact on the civilian population will only perpetuate the hate perceptions and conflict between the communities." It is important that both sides should neither put conditions on nor interfere with the distribution of humanitarian aid. Unfortunately, this was not evident during the period of the cessation of hostilities (early 1995) when the much needed humanitarian assistance could have been provided to the civilian population unconditionally without linking it to the military aspects of the conflict. Both sides must take responsibility for neglecting the civilians and using them as pawns in the war.

KAA and others, particularly the influential Tamil expatriates should appeal to the LTTE leadership also to heed to Dr. Rupesinghe's advice. There is a feeling among the Sinhalese leaders that the leadership of the LTTE cannot be trusted. In this situation, it will help in initiating the negotiation process if the LTTE too demonstrates its sincerity early. On no account such steps would be considered as a sign of weakness. On the contrary, these will reveal its moral strength.

The government has ruled out third-party mediation because according to the Minister of Foreign Affairs "it becomes an interference in our internal affairs." In the interview Dr. Rupesinghe has noted: "Peace in a country depends on the two warring parties themselves wanting to resolve the conflict. That political intention sets the agenda. It becomes a national need. In the Sri Lankan case, this country has enough competence to manage the process. If the two warring parties feel the need for a third party facilitator, then they will invite such third parties to become involved in helping out. Mediation is based on invitation and consent. Then there is no question of interference or imposition."

The rejection of third-party mediation or facilitation is influenced by the perception that the LTTE has been weakened militarily since the security forces have re-occupied much of the Northern province and are in control of the other areas of the two provinces, except the Vanni heartland. Since the media is denied access to the re-occupied areas, any claim of political success cannot be verified. By this restriction, the Government has unintentionally helped the extremists on either side of the ethnic divide to spread anti-government propaganda.

LTTE may be weak now but is not a spent force. Seven months after the success of Operation Riviresa that led to the re-capture of Jaffna, the LTTE attacked the Mullaithivu military base on July 18 1996 killing nearly 1,400 officers and capturing their weapons worth several millions of rupees. Within weeks after the success of Operation Edibala in which the LTTE did not offer any resistance, on February 6, 1997 the latter mounted simultaneous attacks on Vavunativu army base in Batticaloa and on the China Bay air base in Trincomalee. A month earlier (January 9) it had taken on the army in Paranthan, in which according to the army 223 soldiers died. Despite the claim that LTTE has been weakened militarily, the rebels have demonstrated their ability to strike at will and inflict significant losses to the Government. Continued violence will only sustain the intolerable suffering of all the people in Sri Lanka. Similar miscalculation was made by the LTTE in 1995, when it broke off the peace talks and resumed hostilities hoping that its goal could be achieved by force.

Without public support it will be impossible for the Government with its limited manpower resources to control, maintain and secure there-occupied areas against guerrilla attacks. There will not be any winners but only losers in this war. How many more lives should be lost, how long the people should endure the suffering and billions of resources wasted before the leaders and their backers, many of whom are not directly affected by the war come to their senses and give up their strategies of achieving their illusions? If the intention of both sides is to continue the war indefinitely, the Tamil people will be the greater losers. Time will not be on their side. In this event, the Tamils will be losing their numerical strength and the opportunity to share power equitably with other ethnic groups in Sri Lanka.

Political Consensus

DN's approach has the merit that it avoids further losses and the undue and unnecessary suffering of the people, while progressing towards a political solution acceptable to all groups. It deserves serious consideration by all interested in ending immediately the carnage and the distrust between the different communities. In essence his idea entails a two-track approach. Except for the LTTE, the mainstream political parties have not rejected the thirteenth amendment to the present constitution. Its full potential for devolution has not been utilised. There has also been some unfounded criticism in its provisions pertaining to the independent status of the Provincial Councils. For example last year the Supreme Court ruled that so long as the Chief Minister of a Province and his/her Board of Ministers command a majority in the Council, the Provincial Governor cannot dissolve the Council, except on the advice of the Chief Minister.

The UNP is less likely to reject the proposal of the previous Parliamentary Select committee (1992/1993) under the chairmanship of Mangala Moonesinghe, which takes the thirteenth amendment forward towards allaying the concerns of the minorities. AS DN has quite aptly pointed out, the absence of an implementation strategy besides other deficiencies in the central administration arising mainly from the lack of will on the part of politicians and senior bureaucrats "virtually annulled devolution." In the first fast track, the movement should be to get the suitably amended proposal based on the above two schemes, where a broad consensus already exists implemented strictly according to the mutually agreed principles supporting it. This could be the start in the negotiation process and also would serve to validate the will and the sincerity of all the mainstream political parties in finding a permanent solution to the national problem.

(continued on next page)

Direct Talks Between Govt and LTTE with Third Party Mediation a Must

by S.K. Gajanan, USA

Two timely articles which offer two different perspectives of the crisis in Sri Lanka appeared in the February 1997 issue of the Tamil Times - "Crisis in Sri Lanka - Is There a Way Out?" by D. Nesiah and "The Choice for Tamils" by K.A. Anandan.

The article by Mr. Anandan makes a cogent, and indeed, compelling argument against Tamil support for President Kumaratunga's "War for Peace" strategy. It is grounded in the reality of Tamil historical experience, which is well summarised there, the reality that the LTTE cannot be, and should not be, excluded from any solution to the war in Sri Lanka and the reality that the devolution proposals proposed by the Government are seriously deficient. It also makes the valid point that success of the Government's strategy will not result in "a political settlement which will truly ensure that Tamils will have their own space in Sri Lanka where their physical security, economic welfare and ethnic and cultural identity will be ensured." Nor will it end the sufferings of the Tamils except temporarily, because of a continued massive presence of Sinhalese security forces in the North-East.

What Anandan has missed is that the "War for Peace" strategy is already failing for a number of reasons. First, the underlying military component that the LTTE will be reduced to a relatively impotent and localised guerrilla force is not being realised. Second, one political component, namely "winning the hearts and minds" of the Tamil people brought under Government control is turning into a disaster - with massive human rights violations by the security forces alienating those people more than ever. Third, the second political component of the strategy, namely the "devolution proposals" has run into serious difficulties. Fourth, the failure to achieve a quick and decisive military advantage against the LTTE, as anticipated, is proving to be a tremendous drain on the economy, which cannot be sustained for long, either financially or politically. Fifth, there are emerging signs of doubt among the Western countries, who have been generally supportive of President Kumaratunga, about the viability of her war for peace strategy, the depth of her commitment to a political, as opposed to a military solution, and most importantly, about the Government's commitment to human rights.

THE DEBATE ON
The Choice for Tamils

Human Rights Situation

In regard to the human rights concerns, there have been two important developments. First is the U.S. State Department report for 1996 on human rights practices in Sri Lanka, published in February 1997. The report is highly critical of the human rights record of the Government. It notes the marked deterioration of the human rights record of the security forces, and highlights and substantiates that "impunity for those responsible for human rights abuses remained a problem." The deterioration was reported in all categories of violations, extra-judicial killings, disappearances, torture, mass arrests and illegal detentions and rapes. Impunity was noted also in all of those categories. Significantly, this year's report reflects a major turnaround from the previous year, when the State Department complimented the government for its human rights record to such an excessive degree that it evoked an unusual and sharp rebuke from Amnesty International. The current State Department report, while continuing to emphasise the human rights violations by the LTTE, also notes for the first time some important improvements - no reported attacks on civilians during the second half of 1996 and the ending of restrictions on the movement of civilians from LTTE- controlled to Government-controlled areas. Ironically, it is the government that now stands accused of placing barriers on the movement of Tamils seeking safety from the conflict.

The second development on the human rights front is the very recent report (March 1997) of the U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR) mission which visited Jaffna and the Vanni with Government approval in November 1996. The report comments extensively about the pervasive fear of disappearances and rapes in Jaffna and of the plight of the hundreds of thousands of displaced Tamils in the Vanni who have not only been displaced many times over by the military attacks but have also been forced to survive in the most difficult circumstances, with only very limited supplies of essentials, especially medicines. While commending the Government for assuming the responsibility for relief to displaced people, even in LTTE-controlled areas, the USCR notes that the Government has deliberately kept relief supplies very low, by simply refusing to acknowledge the presence of up to 200,000 of the displaced Tamils in the Vanni. In addition, the Government has refused approval to NGOs who wished to provide their own supplies, especially medicines. The report also criticises the detention of Tamils in so-called "welfare centres" in Vavuniya in appalling conditions, and the forcible interdiction of Tamils fleeing voluntarily to India to escape the war.

The essential fact is that more information on the gravity of the human rights violations by security forces is filtering through, despite the continued efforts by the Government to conceal them through restrictions on access to the north-east. More information is also becoming available on the "scorched earth" tactics of the military in the Vanni, including the indiscriminate use of aerial bombing and heavy artillery, and the burning of ready-to-harvest rice crops, which seem aimed at pushing more displaced people into Government detention centres. Finally the insensitivity of the government to the human rights violations by its forces and consequent sufferings inflicted on Tamil civilians has reached outrageous proportions. Two recent examples are the

(continued from page 19)

In the second slow track, the negotiation process should involve appraisal of the effectiveness of the agreed implementation strategy, taking promptly the remedial measures needed to solve the implementation problems and at the same time considering the necessary changes in the scope of devolution with the view to arriving at a final solution. As mentioned by DN, this process in time, depending on the developments in the first track, could change the political environment so much so that the sceptical or reluctant parties may decide to abandon their reservations or withdraw their earlier positions. The prerequisite for the success of this approach is the rebuilding of trust between the different communities, which in turn depends, inter alia, on the speed and efficacy of the progress made in the first track. On no account should such confidence building measures receive a low priority. This is the common challenge that confronts reasonable persons in all the communities, who are interested in the welfare of all the people in Sri Lanka. They cannot afford to fail in this. The LTTE and the Tamil people must recognise the wisdom that lies in following this approach. ●

Government's decision to make the Defence Ministry responsible for investigating the hundreds of 'disappearances' in Jaffna and the failure of the President Kumaratunge to condemn or at least to express regret for the Krishanthi rape-murder.

A particularly tragic but pertinent aspect of the human rights situation in the north east, referred to in both the State Department and USCR reports, consists of the murderous activities in Vavuniya and the east of anti-LTTE groups collaborating with the army. The State Department report lists the military wing of the PLOTE, the Mohan Group and the Rasheek Group.

Nesiah's Approach

The article by Mr. Nesiah takes a very different approach from that of Mr. Anandan. First it is an avowed exercise in hope even to the point that it conflicts with 'reality' in some respects. Second and more important in this context is that it represents what may be called a "moderate" Colombo-centric perspective on the crisis, in terms of the political and military power dynamics as seen there. It is of course different from the "extreme" Sinhala dominant view.

At a general level, he is, of course, right in expressing despair about the downward spiral experienced by Sri Lanka, that war does not solve problems, that there should be a negotiated solution based on a national consensus, with the UNP, SLFP and LTTE at the core. One would also agree with his proposition that we should not be trapped in recriminations over past mistakes and that the negotiation process, once started, could generate its own dynamic in terms of expanding options, and participation. Moreover, he is absolutely correct in stressing the need for effective implementation of any agreement that is worked out, and in emphasising that it is the government which must take the major initiative and in creating the climate for a settlement.

However, problems arise when he tries to apply these general propositions to the Sri Lankan situation. While not wanting to sound unduly negative, there are some important concerns arising from his Colombo-centric view which are discussed below. For the current purpose its key features can be summarised as follows: The concern about the debilitating impact of the war and of the sufferings of the people are stated in nation-wide terms without proper acknowledgement of the enormity of the sufferings of the people of the North-East and of the crimes against humanity being perpetrated there by the security forces; while recognising that the core cause of the war is the "Tamil problem," a refusal to discuss possible solutions in terms of a reasonable power sharing that is sovereignty sharing arrangement between the Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims; consequently possible solutions are discussed in the form of arrangements for decentralising power but not sharing sovereignty between the centre and nine provinces, commonly rejecting a unified North-East region; the acknowledgement of legitimate grievances of the Tamils is expressed in terms of discrimination in language, employment, education and security but excluding government assisted colonisation of the Sinhalese in the North-East; an overwhelming frustration with the LTTE for refusing to play by the rules of a Colombo-centric dynamic and the hope that they can be brought to heel through a combination of military power and enticement of Colombo-based Tamil parties.

This is not to suggest that Nesiah necessarily subscribes to all of the above. What is relevant, however, is that the prescription in his article of a way out of the crisis hews closely to the above moderate Colombo-centric view.

Thus Nesiah's approach to devolution is driven not by the need to meet the reasonable desire of the Tamils for sharing sovereignty, but by a design for decentralisation of powers to nine provinces or regions, seven of which have not even pressed for it. Further, in discussing the parameters of a possible solution, he states that "there is broad understanding that we need some kind of a federal constitution with considerable devolution to the provinces." In fact such an understanding does not exist.

Deficiency in Devolution Proposals

Key leaders of Sinhalese opinion, including President Kumaratunga, almost without exception reject federalism. Nesiah seems to equate the government's current devolution proposals, which he states "by and large contain the essence of a fair settlement" with federalism, ("Federalism - except in name" as some Tamil political leaders in Colombo have claimed) but he is wrong. For example to quote Prof. Lakshman Marasinghe, Professor of Law, University of Windsor, Canada ("Some Thoughts on the Devolution Package" - SLNet Forum Volume 1996, Number 2 January 20, 1996): "A federation entails an allocation of powers to separate constitutional entities. Together with an allocation of powers through devolution there is additionally in a federation an allocation of sovereignty. This is achieved through a devolution of sovereignty. In a typical federation there is, therefore, not only a devolution of powers, but there is also a devolution of sovereignty." He notes that the August 1995 devolution proposals of the Government provide only a devolution of power and not of sovereignty. The clearest evidence of this, of course, is that the arrangement can be changed without the consent of the regions. There are additional deficiencies in regard to the devolution of power concerning finance, land and security, which are referred to in Mr. Anandan's article.

Nesiah's further comments that "for the populations of the north and east to enjoy substantial self government units of devolution need not be engineered to be exclusively mono-ethnic or mono- linguistic" also seems intended to support President Kumaratunga's opposition to "ethnic enclaves" and to a unified north east region. However, Mr. Nesiah does say that "some important changes will be necessary within the devolution proposals" without spelling them out.

Nesiah's statements that the devolution package need not be static but should not preclude further devolution by subsequent generations, appears very enticing, but seem out of touch with reality. It would be unwise for Tamils to agree to a settlement with this vision of the future, given their experience over the past fifty years of dealing with an overwhelming Sinhalese majoritarianism.

The pronounced gap between agreements reached and even legislation approved on matters of concern to Tamils and their actual implementation by successive governments in Colombo is a well-known phenomenon. Thus, at least from a Tamil perspective, a key concern would be how the implementation of the agreed devolution of powers could be guaranteed. However, consistent with the Colombo-centric approach, Mr. Nesiah gets into a rather extensive analysis as to why the Provincial Council Scheme under the 13th Amendment had not worked, even outside the north east, in terms of the shifting power nexus between the SLFP and the UNP in Colombo and in the provinces. It is interesting, but its implication to a durable negotiated constitutional arrangement for the future, at least as far as power sharing for Tamils and Muslims is concerned is not evident.

Odds Against Internal Solution

As for the Government creating the proper climate for a negotiated settlement, one expected a discussion of immediate trust-building steps of the kind that Anandan writes about, supporting the call of people, like Kumar Rupasinghe, an end to the isolation of the north - east from south, including open press.access and free travel and the restoration of unrestricted humanitarian access to food, medicines and other essential supplies and an end to violations of human rights, to be followed by an abatement in the level of the conflict. Unfortunately, Nesiah does not focus on these urgent humanitarian problems and the massive human right violations facing Tamils, bordering on genocide. He focuses instead on the amelioration of discrimination in language, education, employment, housing, and security. No doubt this is important too, but the first priority in creating a proper

(Continued on next page)

THE SPECTRE OF BOFORS AND THE GHOST OF RAJIV

by G.Ramesh

When Robert Vadra had a quiet Kashmiri Hindu wedding with Priyanka Gandhi at Delhi last month, India's first family could not invite two of its close friends - Ottavio Quottrocchi and his wife Maria. An invitation for Quottrocchi would have been too costly for the Gandhi family. Well, Quottrocchi, who led the Italian multinational Snam progetti in India for more than three decades, and his wife had been named by the Indian Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) as recipients of the Bofors bribes, following the receipt of the Bofors bribery papers from Swiss banks. However, the man who got the Swiss authorities to reveal the names, prime minister, H D Deve Gowda, was being welcomed by Sonia Gandhi to the marriage function.

Immediately, the Congress(I) made two demands: that its support to the united front government at the centre led by Deve Gowda would no longer be conditional - the support would be "issue- based"; and that the real recipients of Bofors kickbacks should be named ! Wait a minute, was not the same Congress(I) in power when the bribes were given and also when Quottrochhi and Bofors agent in India Win Chadha managed to sneak out of the country ?!

The Bofors gun deal was more than India's Watergate scandal. They had been part of Indian political mystique for the last ten years - it had made and finished presidents, prime ministers and their governments, army generals, ministers, political parties and newspaper barons. No one was spared and no one spared himself or herself. The deal has also generated a language of political stealth - from agents and commissions new words arose such as payoffs, kickbacks, winding up charges and what not ! Hence, the Bofors gun deal assumes significance not as a mere arms deal, but because of the way in which the entire spectrum of Indian public sphere fell apart as the howitzers boomed and boomed and boomed.

When Olaf Palme of Sweden and Rajiv Gandhi of India decided, in 1984-85, that the Indian army would get 410 numbers of Swedish 155 mm howitzer guns at a cost of Rs 1,472 crore, they also agreed to dispense with commission agents. On the face of it, it was a great decision. But the decade-long probe by the Indian Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has finally established, with evidence from recently revealed Swiss bank papers, that Quottrocchi and Maria and a Bofors agent in India Win Chadha, wife Kanta Chadha and son Harsh Chadha were among the bribe recipients.

The story doesn't end there. There are other players in the game. The fake firms Pitco and Moresco also have Swiss accounts which are expected to be revealed anytime. And the bribes, it has been found, are much more than the initial estimate of Rs 64 crore and have been stashed not just in snowly Switzerland, but all across the globe !

Both in and out of government, Rajiv's stock reply to questions on Bofors would be: "Neither myself nor any member of my family has received any consideration from Bofors". This was in reply to depositions in Swedish courts that the recipients were all Indians. While in power, he reacted predictably by getting his minions to allege that, as a Third World leader, he was being destabilised by Western powers. He kept making weird scoring shots by stating that if non-Indians had received bribes, especially for industrial espionage, it was okay! When hemmed in, he set up the joint parliamentary committee (JPC) only to legitimise the cover-up! The JPC, after interrogating Bofors officials and others, came to the laborious conclusion that the Bofors had paid out only foreigners! While the opposition members boycotted the JPC, the lone dissenting note was written by Aladi Aruna, now Tamil Nadu law minister. This note, coupled with revealations made by Geneva-based journalist Chitra Subramaniam, brought out that Win Chadha of the Svenska and industrialist G P Hinduja of Pitco were the possible recipients.

Chitra's real find was the AE Services, which was clearly not an agent but a front outfit brought in late for receiving a kickback on behalf of someone powerful enough to clinch the deal early enough. Chitra also found damaging revealations from the diary of Martin Ardbo, head of Bofors when the deal was signed. Ardbo gone to London four times to meet Hinduja to manage the cover-up after the news of the bribes broke out. The Ardbo diaries put Rajiv Gandhi really on the mat. The entries referred to Major Bob Wilson, the frontman of AE Services, "Q's involvement becoming a problem because of his close relationship with R", "Wilson's meeting with the Gandhi Trust Lawyer". The diary entries also spoke of one N.

It was like the script of a B-grade Bombay Hindi thriller of the early sixties. All the non-Congress(I) parties reacted by concluding that Q was Quottrocchi, N was Arun Nehru and R, you know who. Rajiv feebly suggested that the entries were not authentic. The Swedish government, in the meantime, sent a fax message to the CBI insisting that the entries and documents exposed by Chitra were indeed true. He didn't speak much after that, except insisting occasionally that neither he nor his family ever received any kickback. Arun Nehru, who went along with V P Singh to the Janata Dal and was part of the National Front government at the centre, quietly parted company with VPS and later quit active politics. He chose to keep silent on the suggestion that he had been kept out of the deal after some crucial phase.

The more intriguing fact was the sudden exit of Rajiv's close friend Arun Singh from the all-important post of minister of state for defence at that time. Lt Gen Krishnaswamy Sundarji, the then army chief who deposed before the CBI earlier this month on the events before the setting

(continued on page 25)

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climate should be that the humanitarian needs of the people in the north-east are met and that human rights violations by security forces are ended. He also conspicuously fails to mention the need to end Government sponsored Sinhalese colonisation in the North-East.

At the end Nesiah is realist enough to recognise the odds against a purely internal resolution of the war. However, surprisingly, given the overall circumstances, he offers only a highly tentative and qualified support for a third-party mediation or external assistance.

Is there then a way out? Obviously there has to be, but not on the basis of a totally Tamil-centric or even a moderate Colombo-centric view of the crisis and its solution. Even if it were not willing to acknowledge it, an objective assessment of the present situation would show that the Government's war for peace strategy is failing and that direct negotiations with the LTTE involving third party mediation or facilitation are inevitable. As Nesiah states, the government must take the first steps in creating a proper climate for negotiations. These steps should be like those suggested by Mr.Kumar Rupesinghe. They deserve repeating: an end to the isolation of the north-east from south, including open press access and free travel and the restoration of unrestricted humanitarian access to food, medicines and other essential supplies and an end to violations of human rights. These violations now border on genocide. Indeed the government has an obligation to implement most of these under international laws concerning human rights and the humanitarian law of internal conflicts. These steps should be followed, or be accompanied after substantial progress has been made by substantive discussions without any preconditions on a whole range of issues, including future political arrangements. ●

SHAMANS AND DEITIES OF TAMIL NADU OLD AND NEW

by G.Ramesh

Tamil Nadu witnessed two birthdays in February - of besieged AIADMK supremo and former chief minister Jayalalitha and DMK heir-apparent and Chennai mayor Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin, who is a future contender for the state's top post. Jayalalitha turned 49 and Stalin 46. That both celebrations were marked by personal religiosity could not be missed. Jayalalitha, recovering after recurrent back problems, made it a point to visit the famous Vadivudai Amman temple at Tiruvotriyur in the northern outskirts of Madras. And Stalin, after cutting a huge cake modelled after the Rippon Building housing his corporation office, made a public display of politely accepting he prasadam sent by Bangaru Adigalar, a Madam head-cum-education don whose Adi Parasakthi peetam is strategically located on the Madras-Tiruchi highway, attracting Tamils from across the world.

Yes, Bangaru presides over an empire of educational institutions, ospitals and a substantial cadre-base. He is the Dravidian answer to the Brahmins' Kanchi Acharyas whose mutt is also strategically located on the Madras-Bangalore highway. Bangaru's political power is awesome and he hobnobs with all Dravidian leaders including Karunanidhi whom he hugged publicly after the DMK assumed office. Bangaru's chief disciple was none other than Dr Visalakshi, wife of V R Nedunchezhian, perhaps the only survivor of the five founders of the DMK. And worse, yang Visalakshi and Nedunchezhian had got married in the "self-respect" way those days.

Dr Visalakshi's about-turn and the two birthdays signify the new matrix of religion in Tamil Nadu - religion is not mere, or no longer spirituality; it is not even just folkish or popular stuff; it is no longer evil or anti-science; it need not be attacked the way Stalin's father Karunanidhi once used to do in his film dialogues and lyrics. Rather, religion is neutral; it is benevolent; it spreads and catches up; it is kitsch, a mass phenomenon, combining well with professional education, computer graphics and good intentions like world peace and elimination of AIDS.

Over the last two decades, such mass religion has seen phenomenal rise in Tamil Nadu, right under the nose of Dravidian regime which otherwise started out professing avowed atheism. Karunanidhi, one of the last of the surviving Dravidian titans, occasionally reminisces about those heady years in the forties and fifties when party ideologues invoked Mazzini and Garibaldi and innocently discussed Bertrand Russel and Robert Ingersoll.

Karunanidhi takes pride in saying that he was a participant in then relentless war against Brahminism which Periyar E V Ramaswamy termed the fountainhead of all evil in the subcontinent. In his quest for reform, Periyar pursued the path of uncompromising iconoclasm in dealing with the gods of the Sanskritic pantheon and rationalist-empiricism in the public sphere. Periyar simply usurped the Dravidian mantle from earlier ideologues of the movement like Maraimalai Adigal who was trying to blend Western science and Saivist monism. Interestingly, Periyar and Maraimalai, however, were together in denouncing all folk gods. Maraimalai, whose writings had been nationalised by Karunanidhi in this year's budget, wanted to bring all folk deities under the regime of a singular godhead; but Periyar would have loved to have blasted a la Chinese Maoists the statues of even folk gods; but the eventuality of having to antagonise those very classes whom he wanted to liberate from the yoke of Hinduism must have stopped him in his tracks!

During these years, the DK-DMK went on to exploit the emergence of a new public sphere in theatre, oratorical stage and film. Annadurai and Karunanidhi were past-masters in this task and the latter rose to the occasion with aplomb and finesse. Actors like Sivaji Ganesan and MGR set many a heart afire with the dialogues of Karunanidhi. The DK-DMK brand of rationalism and empricism had successful runs, managing to secretly convert even quite a few Brahmins.

However, this phase seemed to have came to an end at the time the DMK wanted to enter the electoral arena in the fifties. In having to manage the equations of power, the DMK had to contend with religion as a live, folk phenomenon in the public sphere. DMK ideologues including Annadurai and Karunanidhi had hit upon a new solution coming up with fresh declarative statements: Onre kulam oruvane devan (There is but one God and one race), a takeoff from Tamil siddha saint Tirumoolar, and Ezhaiyin sirippil iravainaik kanbom (May we see God in the smile of the poor), an imitation of Mahatma Gandhi's invocation of the Daridra Narayana.

This shift in the DMK's language was more than tactical or ideological. It has to be seen as more than an electoral gimmick or ploy. It was as much a linguistic turn. The DMK was to change drastically to get accommodated to a new public sphere. For once and ever, the above proverb-like statements resolved a basic contradiction, just as every proverb does. At the everyday level, the shift allowed one and all to join the party, and well, in due course, even get to worshipping its leaders!

With its rituals reaching a practicable level, the DMK was to become the new Tamil religion, by imitating and without having to drastically substitute the older ones. In this new religion, invocation of the Tamil Mother was to replace the mandatory prayers and elaborate, fiery and eloquent speeches and action-scenes by the new gods were to replace the bhakti songs. And who else, but Annadurai, Karunanidhi and MGR would become fit for these roles! The three are simply gods for the Dravidian cadres; their stories are silly to the core: for the DMK, the lineage is Anna and Kalaignar, with MGR being the renegade or estranged brother; for the AIADMK, it is Anna and Thambi MGR, Karunanidhi being the usurper and betrayer. And, never mind, Periyar, who set out to destroy religion altogether, is ritually invoked as the Super-patriarch-God by not only Dravidians but ideologues of all hues: for them, Periyar is the godly beacon light and others are just human aberrations!

The late scholar Burton Stein told this writer a few years ago that he sometimes wondered whether the Dravidian movement was getting to practise an altered form of bhakti religion. His point came as no shock to me. Annadurai has Edhayum Thangum Idhayam; MGR, alive or dead, is Idhaya Deivam (meaning the Deivam dwelling in the heart of Annadurai as well as those of MGR fans); Karunanidhi, who once gloated over his being called Karikal Chozhan or Mujib-ur-Rahman of Tamil Nadu, is now Vazhum Deivam or Kann Kanda Deivam to his cadres. An invitation printed by an enthusiastic temple officer in Madurai described Karunanidhi as Vazhum Deivam recently. Karunanidhi shuddered in disagreement and got the officer transferred; but in the ultimate analysis, he can be seen to be enjoying the rituals even as he chides them.

Thus, in today's Tamil Nadu, politics imitates religion; and religion, in turn, has become a mass affair by imitating politics. Every leader of any consequence is getting deified as statues in public junctions. The very categories of religion and politics seem to go for a swirl. Every new leader is on his/her way to becoming a mass living deity: Jayalalitha is Idhaya Deivam (Goddess of the heart) and Puratchith Thalaivi (revolutionary leader); G K Moopanar is Makkal Thalaivar Peoples' leader); Stalin is Ezhu Gnayiru (rising sun) and Ilaya Suryan (youthful sun); Vai Gopalasamy is Puratchip Puyal (revolutionary storm); Dr Ramadoss is Tamizhinap Poraali (fighter of the Tamil

nation); and K Veeramani, the chairman of the trustee of Periyar, is, believe it or not, Tamizhinath Thalaivar (leader of the Tamil nation), declaring himself to be a rival for the mantle of both Karunanidhi and Veluppillai Prabakaran!

Of course, unlike his north Indian counterparts, Karunanidhi describes himself as an atheist and steers clear of visiting heads of Mutts or performing pujas. He avoids attending religious rituals of marriages and attends only reception events (which may be a bigger and more absurd ritual). He is keen to put down communal problems with an iron hand, as was discovered by the BJP and the Jehad Committee during the spate of clashes in Coimbatore and Tiruppur. Also, Karunanidhi has always viewed temple robberies with concern, as more than mere law and order problems, since he thinks that temples are great cultural treasures; he recently lamented that in his hometown Tirukkuvalai there was only one person playing Nadaswaram in the Sivan temple!

Does all this make up a contradiction ? Is Karunanidhi going soft on religion ? Why is he tolerating a lot of religiosity in his own party, among his Udanpirappugal ? Doesn't he know the dangers of religion, esoteric, folk or mass-based, some people ask. It would be easy to term Karunanidhi's current stand as a betrayal of Dravidian ideals or a reconciliation with Tamil religious practices. However, the process of it all is far more complex than that. It is evident that Karunanidhi has contributed to the erection of many a new deity including himself. It is necessary to recall here a crucial scene in the film Parasakthi whose dialogues were penned by Karunanidhi (the scene itself is a take-off of a similar scene in Annadurai's Velaikkari): the protagonist Gunasekaran confronts the statue of Kali in a temple. Later in a court of law which indicts him, Gunasekaran states his stand: "Koil Koodathu Enru Sollavillai. Koil Kodiyavargalin Koodaram Agak Koodathu Enruthan Sonnen" (I did not say that the temple is evil. What I said was that the temple should not become the fortress of evil forces).

Note not the literal meaning of the above sentence, which Karunanidhi never tires of quoting (the latest occasion was a few days ago when he addressed a meeting of the committee to supervise renovation of Tamil Nadu's temples chaired by him), but its alliterative power: Ko, Koo, Ko, Ko, Koo, Koo. Is it not a kind of chanting ?! With the result that, in the course of history, this chanting has overlapped, if not replaced, the earlier chanting of mantrams; more curiously, the new pujari (shaman) has not only mimicked the earlier one but also has himself become one of the new mimic-Gods !

The only question left is the possible reconciliation of the Dravidian regime with its contemporary polar opposite: mainstream and mass north Indian religion. MGR, the earlier God, was already trying that but. He had already set the course for Karunanidhi to follow. And it is perhaps a matter of time before Karunanidhi attempts the same. He may have to do that soon if the BJP captures power at the centre. His attempt then is sure to invite the wrath of Periyarists who will go on to brand him not just as an aberration but as a betrayer of Dravidian principles. Yes, if Gods are not heroes, they have to adorn the mantle of villains. It is a sort of punishment. Never are Gods, or even mimic-Gods, ever permitted to be aberrations! ●

ARREST OF LANKAN TAMILS IN TAMIL NADU

T N Gopalan

There just does not seem to be any end to the woes of the Sri Lankan Tamils in the very land where they have taken refuge, away from the horrors of their own native island. Whether under Jayalalitha or Karunanidhi, in Tamil Nadu, in the post-IPKF period, and more so after the Rajiv assassination, the Lankan Tamil refugees have become the favourite whipping boy of the government of the day. Any time it is under pressure from any quarter especially when it feels called upon to establish its patriotic credentials, it simply pounces on the hapless refugees, and the public at large too willingly accept even the most outlandish claims made by the government in this regard

In the latest development of its kind, three of them have been taken into custody under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act allegedly for "conspiring to procure medical supplies to the LTTE, a banned organisation in this country." And with them a Tiger cadre and a native Tamil doctor charged with collaborating with the rest. Maravanpulavu Sachidanandam, running the prestigious publishing house, Kanthalagam in Chennai, Eelavendan, a leader of the now defunct Tamil Eelam Liberation Front (TELF), Mrs Malinidevi Rasanayagam, a Lankan Tamil emigre based in Australia and who had come to India on a brief visit and Mr Sridhar, a young medical doctor, practising in the city were arrested when they were found engaged in discussions with Pandian alias Muralidaran in an apartment where Malinidevi had been lodged.

According to the police, on being surprised, Pandian, tried to swallow a small pill, but the police escorts acted in the nick of time to retrieve the "deadly capsule" and he was rushed to the hospital where he recovered in time. And seized from the conspirators" was some LTTE propaganda material, including 17 pictures of Prabhakaran, lists of medicines and Indian currency to the tune of a hundred thousand rupees.

Following the interrogation of Pandian, the police came to know that there were a couple of other Tiger boys too operating in the state, one of them in touch with his Jaffna high command through a wireless set. However Pandian's associates could not be traced.

Subsequently A S Mani, editor of Netrikkan, a Tamil weekly, was also arrested for allegedly procuring the LTTE cadre a cellular phone. Significantly no journalist organisation cared to protest the arrest of one of their own tribes on such a trivial charge. (That Mani's credentials as a journalist leave a lot to be desired is a different story altogether.)

The courts routinely deny bail to anyone accused of being in collusion with the Tigers. The learned principal sessions judge A Ramamurthy, for instance, smelled something fishy in Dr Sridhar's prescribing medicines at the instance of an LTTE cadre. The very act of interaction with a member of a banned organisation laid him open to charges of conspiracy.

Incidentally this is the first time in Tamil Nadu that procuring medical supplies for a Lankan militant group is termed a crime.

Those who delude themselves, into believing that there is a groundswell of sympathy for the Lankan Tamil cause yet again in Tamil Nadu might be disappointed to know that there has been little public reaction to the arrests. Both the English and Tamil Press faithfully reproduced the police version. While the saving grace perhaps was the absence of any patriotic hysterics, few cared to question the justness or rationale of the state government's action.

Both Sachidanandam and Eelavendan are familiar figures in media circles but there was no overt expression of sympathy, leave alone any denunciation of the arrests.

Sachidanandam, though an uncompromising Eelamist, has not been known to be a Tiger drum-beater. If anything, on occasions, he has denounced the LTTE

ways. Certainly he has always tried hard to mobilise public opinion in favour of the suffering Tamils in the island and sought to interact with politicians across the spectrum. Whatever his personal commitments or even dealings with the Tigers, the arrest of the soft-spoken Sachidanandam did come as quite a shock to those who knew him well.

This correspondent and others of his ilk who have never been admirers of the LTTE had felt similarly grieved in 1991 when veteran editor Sivanayagam was hauled up for associating himself with a pro-Tiger English journal. Ultimately the poor man was deported. There were some muted protests but to no effect. One can only hope that a similar fate does not overtake Sachidanandam.

Eelavendan is, of course, a self-proclaimed champion of the Tigers, and he never misses out an opportunity to justify and glorify the LTTE. Still it is difficult to conceive of him as a saboteur. While nothing much is known of Mrs Rassanayagam, the young Dr Sridhar has not had any track record of anti-national activities.

If such are the bio-data of the arrested, the charge itself smacks of sheer vendetta or, at least, cussedness. When even the Red Cross and similar organisations are allowed to take medicines to the Tigers by the Lankan government itself, how could doing so from this soil be described as a crime?

Besides it is common sense that the medicines procured by the Tigers also go to take care of the needs of the thousands of displaced Jaffnaites, now suffering untold miseries in the Wanni jungles. No such argument will, however, sway Karunanidhi who is out to assert his "patriotic" credentials at every available opportunity and thus forestall any possibility of his government's dismissal yet again on a charge of encouraging and abetting the Tigers.

Karunanidhi knows well both Sachidanandam and Eelavendan and the former has enjoyed some considerable access to the Chief Minister. Even if one were to assume that the arrests had been effected without his knowledge, the fact remains that he has not reacted since either. He perhaps sees the arrests as a counter to those who were crying wolf over the PMK's rallies and conferences. But then he has rarely bothered about the larger costs of his throne-saving actions.

But then why would he bother when the public at large are willing to swallow hook, line and sinker any kind of cock and bull story when it concerns the Tigers. "Well, it might be an overreaction on the part of the government. But then you don't know what the Tigers are up to at any point of time. When they can kill Rajiv on this soil", mow down Padmanabha and his company so ruthlessly, not pausing to think for a moment what would be the fallout of their actions on their main supporter, the DMK, or even on themselves a vengeful group rarely has any long-term vision, they can be trusted to do the most unexpected thing at the most unexpected time... given such a situation, the government of the day has little choice but to crack down on them... you allow them to procure medicines now, they will move on to guns before long...". Such was the typical liberal reaction.

Mr P Nedumaran and other hard-core LTTE supporters did go on a day's fast to protest the arrests. The People's Union for Civil Liberties organised a poorly attended hall-meeting and demanded the release of the arrested Lankans - their demand did not include LTTE cadre of course - and also immediate supply of medicines to the beleaguered Tamils.

The speakers including poet Inquilab especially came down hard on the government for the arrest of Dr Sridhar. "How could prescribing medicines and even furnishing a list of possible suppliers by itself constitute a crime?" they wondered and also pointed out that even under the Unlawful Activities Act procuring medicines could not be termed a crime.

Be that as it may barring those two token protest actions, the people at large tended to ignore the arrests as of no consequence. The judiciary, for its part gladly bought the argument that interacting with a banned organisation was a serious violation of law and hence merited imprisonment and prosecution.

The Tamil nationalists as also liberals frequently argue that when the RSS and other right-wing communal groups were banned in the wake of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, their members were not taken into custody. They moved about freely, addressing public meetings and making provocative speeches. No one was barred from interacting with the leaders of the banned organisations. Why apply a different standard in the case of the LTTE alone? They ask.

Technically they are in the right. But the "patriotic sections aver that all said and done no foreign organisation daring to liquidate "our leader" can be allowed to operate from this soil. Those who say so might be downright hypocrites, or possibly they underestimate the dangers posed by the communal elements. Still the unfortunate ground reality is that such are the prevailing perceptions, and no politician dares say or do anything against such views.

What is the way out then? To keep the LTTE angle back-stage and seek to mobilise public opinion on the single agenda of the continuing sufferings of the Lankan Tamils in the island could help open up more space. But no one is listening.

However, the larger question is whether the sectarian stress on the LTTE's exclusivity could really stoke up Tamil nationalism in a big way - in a situation of increasing rich/poor divide with unpredictable consequences for the country. ●

(continued from page 22)

up of the JPC, is convinced that Rajiv's prime ministerial office was involved in a messy cover-up affair; and that Arun Singh quit in disgust after telling Sundarji that the cover-up was being done to save "one man's skin".

The retired general went on to state that he had recommended scrapping of the Bofors gun deal as soon as the bribery reports made it to the Swedish radio. However, the then defence secretary S S Bhatnagar had asked him to write that the cancellation would jeopardise India's national interests! He had refused to do it and had sent a fresh note saying the very opposite. Rajiv's office had lapsed into silence afterwards, says Sundarji.

The general further damned Rajiv by fresh disclosures: on Sundarji's recommendation, a senior defence ministry official had sent a cable to Bofors threatening to cancel the deal if the names of the bribe recipients were not not disclosed. Bofors, at that point, seemed willing to come clean but this was not liked by Rajiv, as subsequent events were to prove. Bofors officials were made to stay back in Sweden till they were summoned by the JPV. And, the general stunned everyone by revealing that the the senior defence official was reprimanded by Rajiv himself.

Now it is clear that Quottrocchi was the key recipient on behalf of AE Services. He was so powerful even during Narasimha Rao's time that the CBI never got to interrogate him though the Swiss government had made it clear that he was appealing in Swiss courts to prevent AE Services' papers to be sent to India.

With all the revealations and more to flow, there are the following possibilites:

(a) Quottrocchi might have taken the kickback after using his Gandhi family links to swing the deal in favour of Bofors.

(b) The AE Services account was set up by Arun Nehru or someone else to receive kickbacks on behalf of either Rajiv or the Congress(I). When Arun Nehru and Rajiv fell out, Quottrocchi was brought in to manage the money.

Any which way, the ghost of Rajiv stands to lose from a fresh encounter with the ever-hanging spectre of Bofors. If Quottrocchi took the money, Rajiv was trying to protect a a family friend. Bad enough. If Rajiv took the money on behalf of the Congress(I) using friend Quottrocchi as a frontman, he is not the young visionary leading India to the 21st century, but a typical party fund collector. Worse. Or, if Rajiv collected the cash and failed in the cover-up operation, he has betrayed friend Quottrocchi and getting him chased out of India and getting the Congress(I) to weaken in the process. Unforgivable. ●

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Book Review

A BOOK TO REFLECT AND REGRET

Sri Lanka: Lost Opportunities

by Ketheswaran Loganathan

(Centre for Policy Research & Analysis, Faculty of Law, University of Colombo, December 1996)

Review by Prof. Bertram Bastiampillai

Former Senior Professor of History & Political Science, University of Colombo

This is a book that offers refreshing reading and provokes the reader to reflect, and regret. Ketheswaran critically reviews the abortive past endeavours to resolve the enduring ethnic conflict that is wrecking and ruining the "paradise isle", Sri Lanka.

He takes the reader through a long but pointless journey of futile discussions, incomplete negotiations and broken promises which has ultimately led one nowhere. The travails of the genesis of a "nation" which never succeeded in becoming an inclusive nation is incisively traced and analytically recounted.

The time during which a just dispensation could have been made when "Tamil civil society" in the initial post-independence years" was primarily conciliatory", and there was no "demand for federalism and regional autonomy" was vainly allowed to slip by.

The author properly identifies the "Sinhala Only" Act as the measure that triggered discontent and disillusionment among the Tamils which later escalated following the commission of one folly after another. A request for the use of Tamil by "the Tamil speaking minority" was considered to be only as "what the communists and communalists want" by a leading but vitriolic educationist who was in the forefront to thwart any solution meant to meet the difficulties that the Tamil speakers had to contend with when they were suddenly rendered illiterate and required to use for official purposes a language alien to them.

A sane and sensible solution was denied and there commenced the passive agitation of the Tamils which was suppressed by violent retaliation from some extremist elements of the majority community.

Later on, as the author recapitulates, began the marginalisation of the Tamils so as to eclipse them from the politics and the economy of the island. State sponsored colonisation resulted in a rise in the population of the majority community in the Eastern Dry Zone by about five times from 1949 to 1959.

This trend, according to Ketheswaran, manifested itself "in changes in electoral representations and redemarcation of electoral constituencies, to the detriment of the Tamil polity - particularly in the Eastern Province". Eventually the disastrous result of such heady actions was that Sri Lanka society was rent apart.

Ketheswaran remains lucid and logical when he examines the Bandaranaike - Chelvanayagam pact, its abrogation owing to the pressure of intolerant and extreme personalities, the shameful riots of 1958, and the unsuccessful "Salvage Operations" undertaken thereafter.

The author takes a critical look at the Senanayake - Chelvanayagam agreement and the foiling of it because it could "Divide the country" as a few irrational elements obstinately and irrationally concluded. Thence began the painful "march toward self- destruction": the rift in society became sadly clear and surer.

Thereafter Ketheswaran saliently delineates the relationship between the constitutional reforms in the 70's and the emergence of the cry for Tamil Eelam. As he rightly discerns the grievances of the numerical minority community aggregated and then originated into Tamil youth militancy, The author arrives at cogent conclusions about the damages that were wrought in Sri Lankan society owing to "The education policy, most inappropriately labelled as 'standardisation' which was severely unfair to Tamil students.

He appropriately and supportively quotes the views of Professor C R de Silva to strengthen his understanding. Throughout the study, Ketheswaran buttresses his usually valid generalisations and acceptable conclusions by quoting sustaining evidence from contemporary personalities and learned commentators who knew much about the intricacies of the conflict.

Ketheswaran's language and style lead him to make candid observations. In evaluating the Tamil response to the 1972 Constitution he unhesitatingly describes it as "High Voltage Nationalism," and in connection with the 1977 General Elections he distinguishes "Political Demagoguery." A dispassionate well-argued study is made of the "1978 Constitution and Tamil Question" and in the process he uses interesting and relevant evidence.

Ketheswaran sticks to a strict chronological order as he proceeds to recapitulate the sad events that accounted for the incremental worsening of relations between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils. The anti-Tamil riots of 1983 not only severely damaged inter-ethnic relations, but worse, it led to a militarisation of the communal conflict that had plagued the island since independence in 1948.

As the author notes the situation deteriorated so as to make India a sanctuary for Tamils who fled to survive violence, and more importantly made India a mediator in an external issue indicating the failure of the Sri Lankan authorities to solve a problem that was created by them, and now confronted them as a monster. Yet, at the end, the writer pungently states "talking stopped and fighting intensified".

But however the myopic practices of the larger lot of Sri Lankans led, as the author convincingly concludes, to an "Internalisation of External Mediation" following the Indo-Lanka Accord and the 13th Amendment Ketheswaran cites diverse sources and furnishes the reader with a full and well-probed account.

He exhibits a firsthand understanding of the events and times; a brief but catastrophic period in contemporary history. Negotiations in these years fizzled out and left the country in a worse position than ever before.

Ketheswaran sees in the sequel thereafter a missed opportunity to be lamented as having been "so close and yet so far". The account focuses on the proceedings of the Select Committee headed by Mangala Moonasinghe.

Ketheswaran Loganathan writes objectively and with muted emotion. He has assiduously consulted several sources and clearly used his findings to advantage so as to present ably in a forthright and lucid manner his considered conclusions, cogently and forcefully.

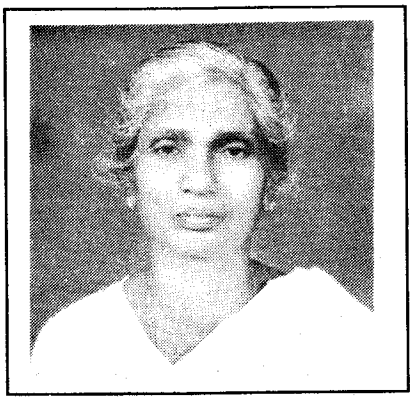
He dissects the clumsy handling of sensitive issues and diagnoses the causes for the repeated failures of leaders who had to face the formidable problems posed by the continuing conflict which has cost the country immensely.

The valuable nine appendices in his book are highly informative and usefully enhance our understanding of Kethes waran's study. Many are the lessons to be learnt from his easy to read book so as to steer clear from pitfalls and stem a march to folly if one has to handle adroitly a national question of cardinal importance; it still is not too late to do so, affirms the writer.

(Courtesy of "The Sunday Times")

APPRECIATION

MANONMANY SUBRAMANIAM (POOAMMAH)



The life of my mother was not different from that of many mothers of her generation from Jaffna. Her formal education did not go beyond the fifth grade in Tamil. The enormous sacrifices and toils made on behalf of her children were also not exceptional. The tribute paid here is, therefore, a tribute to all mothers, whose sacrifices contributed to the economic advancement of their offsprings. Indeed, they played a key role in the enhancement of the family incomes and savings, which enabled many to construct decent houses and acquire the basic facilities which by the then prevailing standards were luxuries. The landsca- pe of Jaffna that emerged and which my generation admired and cherished until its destruction recently was hrough the sweat, tears and prayers of many mothers.

There are many things in life that one learns outside the formal educational system, which cannot be learnt even from the prestigious universities in the world. In this respect, I consider my mother as a learning institution not found elsewhere. The home in which her authority was supreme was a revered place. She laid down the rules to be observed at all times and she had her ways to deal with the miscreants. Difficult cases needed the assistance of the God. She would appeal to Him to drive some sense into their minds and mend their incorrect ways. Whether it was the power of the Almighty or the sight of her desperate plight seeking God's interventi- on, often she achieved her desired results.

She was the youngest daughter of a trader in the Jaffna bazaar, who sold only dried chillies from one of the many small stalls in it. He was well known not solely as a trader but as one whose advice was sought by many on various matters ranging from astrology to native medicine. She was never shy to disclose the occupation of her father and the difficulties their parents went through to educate her brothers and feed the family. She was very proud of his hardwork and attachment to the family. She too like her brothers must have had the yearning and determination to learn despite the many household chores she had to perform daily, for I remember her teaching me the English alphabet. Like many other subjects, she must have learnt the alphabet from others. In so far as her priorities were concerned, the first, second and third priorities were educating the children. Had she had the opportunities to a formal education, there would certainly much to write about her academic achievements.

My father, the eldest in a family of seven children at the time of his marriage was employed in FMS (Malaysia). His salary was the main source for providing the means for educating his brothers and ke- eping the kitchen hearth in Urumpirai (Jaffna) burning. The sacrifice of my mother started from that time. My father died in Malaysia when I was just completing my college education and the youngest brother was just a toddler. I was the eldest of six children - four boys and two girls. I had lost four years of schooling in Malaya due to the Japanese occupation in the 1940's and I was sent to Ceylon with my younger bro- ther to be educated there. My mother so-mehow kept all of us in good health and mentally strong, despite the severe shortage of food during the war. My father got the courage to survive and hope for the return of better times from my mother's encouragement and moral support.

My parents never even dreamt of settling permanently in a foreign country and eagerly looked forward to their return to their mother country. They never had any doubts about what their homeland was. They had a secure one in the land they were born. They must have thought that by sending the two older boys early to the homeland, the base for their eventual settlement after returning from Malaya would be strengthened.

What we witness now when many are desperate to emigrate to foreign countries would not have flashed even in their worst dreams! The major challenge that my mother faced after the early demise of my father was to take care of her six children on her return to Ceylon, without any steady income. She had to depend chiefly on the meager family savings and investment income arising therefrom. She had to provide dowries to get the two girls married, which she did before I was employed. Her accomplishments now seem a miracle in the context of the present economic conditions. Free education and food subsidies no doubt helped in her determined efforts to provide a better and secure future for the children.

Her determination to live in the home that she not only built solely out of her own savings but also physically helped the ma-sons constructing it, despite the known risk and hardships faced by her along with her fellow citizens is typical of her courage and independent personality. The letter written by a friend, which I still retain describes how adamant she had been in refusing to move to the Thenmaratchchi area preferring to die in her own home, rather than be chased out of her "castle". The weak and frail lady in her eighties was forced against her wishes to join the so-called historic exodus from Jaffna that followed the retake of the area by the military. Many of us fear-ed that her wish to die in her own home might not be fulfilled. She had throughout her life placed faith in God and He did not let her down, as she returned with the help of friends to her home when Thenmaratch-chi too was taken over by the security forc-es. Being a true believer, she attributed all the achievements and successes of her ch-ildren also to the powers of God.

During my overseas assignment in West Africa, I succeeded in persuading her to join me and my children. I hardly realized then, the people and the way of life that she was going to miss. She very soon described herself as a prisoner in an alien social and cultural environment and I had to take her back to her homeland. It is still fresh in my mind the reply she gave me when I described the difficult economic conditions in Jaffna. She told me that a person did not live by food alone and if there were hardships in Jaffna, she would prefer to suffer the same along with all other people there. She missed the sound of the temple bell, all the poojahs in the adjacent Ganesh temple, those dropping in for help and advice and indeed the old ladies with whom she gossiped and shared her concerns. A lesson that I learnt from this experience was that unless people want willingly to live in a different social environment, it is difficult to force them into it. Those who departed before her were more fortunate in that they did not witness the destruction of their precious assets, the loss of their loved ones and untold suffering. They did not die without hope and with their expectations not fulfilled, in so far as safety and security of all members of their families are concerned. Even occasional visits by those living far away were important for them to keep the family bonds firm. Family units are now split and members of even one family are scattered in many countries. Even at the time of death, not one among their children, grandchildren and great grand children could be around. Nor could anyone be present to cremate the dead.

This is what happened to my mother and I am sure there are many others who would have been in the same plight unable to pay the last respects to such deserving persons, whose sacrifices are not comparable with those of their progenies considering their achievements that benefitted the succeeding generations. Their contributions must not be forgotten by the community and should be recorded in the history for the present and future generations to pay homage to them.

The lady who overcame many challenges in her life and gave support and encouragement to others in their difficult times passed away on 28th January 1997 in her home in Koddady, Jaffna. She was 83 at the time of her death. She will be missed not only by her children but also by many who knew her as Pooamma, the name given by which her favourite niece (presently in New Zealand) more than six decades ago.

S. Narapalasingam

BECAUSE I AM A JOURNALIST

By Gamini Navaratne

I write the way I write
Because I am a Journalist
I do not owe an explanation
But I do wish to get the record straight
For there appears to be much misunderstanding
Among a small coterie;
They can't distinguish between a concubine
(Member of the kept media)
And a porcupine (the kind that
Stings when necessary!)

In the "Dark Days" of 1970-77,
There arose a great leader
Who fired the People's imagination
With visions of a brave New Lanka,
A Land flowing with milk and honey,
Where people can lead a life of peace,
Where Liberty and justice shall prevail
In the true democratic spirit.

After 34 years in the wings
He got his chance in Seventy-seven
To do the wonderful things he always said
He would do for his Motherland.

After six years at the helm
How far are we from the Promised Land!
Of course, there has been DEVELOPMENT;
"The results are patent
In every part of the country."

As the propaganda-wallahs repeatedly say,
But the Development has been lop-sided,
As the critics continue to insist,
The main problems remain unsolved,
Many now not knowing how to subsist!

On the other hand,
What were promised to be banished...
Bribery, corruption, waste and nepotism...
Thrive as never before!
More ominous, the authoritarian trend persists
As people's rights are whittled away,
We are inside, not outside, Dictatorship's door
So say many opponents.

Who compare Sri Lanka to Hitler's Germany!
Yes, "free and fair" elections are held,
But what is the use! They ask,
State power remains entrenched
In a single hand!

Down the ages,
Dissent has been the progenitor
Of much reform and progress
In religion, science, technology and the arts;
The Buddha was the greatest dissenter,
Noble hero and reformer,
Who pointed the way to Nirvana
To countless millions.

But in "Buddhist Lanka", it is now a "crime"
To say "No" or ask "Why!"
Even venerable heads get bashed
For refusing to comply!

From vantage positions,
From privileged positions,
Politicians may indulge in whims and fancies
May even victimise opponents,
Assassinate reputations,
The hapless victims may have none to appeal to!
But a wrong is a wrong. Whoever does it,
And the Journalist's job is to expose it,
If necessary, even tell the world;
Why the world?
At times and in certain situations,
International public opinion
Is a great redeemer.

For instance, in Seventy-one,
It forced the authorities
To curb police and army excesses,
Remember, it was the foreign Press
That exposed the Manamperi case?

At a time when in "Dharmista Lanka"
Life is tending to become "nasty, brutish and short:",
Jaffna's situation could have been worse
If not for international concern.

Politicians when in the opposition
Crave foreign publicity for the rulers' misdeeds;
But once in power, they always say,
"You're tarnishing Sri Lanka's image!"

In other countries, Journalists take the lead
In the fight for Human Rights.
In our country, they take a back seat,
Many by compulsion, others by inclination,
And sing the hosannas of the rulers
While they remain silent
Even as their own rights get eroded!

They forget that, between 1970-77,
Opposition politicians shouted from the rooftops,
"Press Freedom is the essence of Liberty,
The source of all other Liberties,
Suppress, restrain or control it,
Then autocracy rears its head."

Citing US and Indian precedents, prized
Then they said "It is a prized privilege
To speak one's mind,
Although not always with perfect good taste,
On all public institutions."

They were for "the unfettered interchange
Of ideas for bringing change,
Political and social,
Desired by the People."

Debate on public issues, they said,
"Should be uninhibited, robust and wide open,
That it may well include vehemently caustic,
And sometimes unpleasantly sharp,
Attacks on government and public officials
For they recognised "the occasional tyrannies
Of governing majorities..."

Now it must be perfectly clear
To all those who have asked,
Or wondered,
Why I write the way I write,
Neither pelf nor position
Can ever make me change,
Nor threats of any kind.....

(Saturday Review, 4 June 1983)

(continued from page 10)

diated talks between the local leadership of the LTTE and representatives of Muslims of Oddamavadi, the reminder by the LTTE delegation that anyone that wields weapons against their struggle is an enemy and the call to the Muslim people to extend their unstinted support to their struggle is, indeed, ominous. What does the LTTE expect of the Muslims as proof of their "unstinted support"?

On the other hand, the Muslim community are being increasingly driven to seek the protection of the security forces, hence, making the allegations of "fifth columnists" a self-fulfilling prophesy.

The temptation on the part of the security- military apparatus to pour oil on troubled waters and the past experience of preying on the fears of the Muslims by arming Muslim youths and directing them against Tamil civilians, if repeated, can only lead to the further rupturing of Tamil-Muslim relations in the Eastern Province and the upward spiralling of violence.

The tendency on the part of the Tamils in the Eastern Province to see the LTTE as their "protectors" from the Muslim homeguards and of the Muslims to see the Sri Lankan security forces as their "protectors" from the LTTE, must cease. This can only aggravate matters.

What is required then is an authentic people to people contact and confidence-building measures involving Tamil and Muslim sections of civil society. This should include vigilance against any moves to disrupt relations - in particular, vigilance against bloodletting and, if necessary, self-defence committees that include Tamils and Muslims. This can only be brought about by Tamil and Muslim villages forging closer links and being collectively responsible for each other's safety and security.

Mediations between LTTE and the local Muslim representatives alone, without pressure from civil society, will not go very far - despite, ICRC's good intentions and LTTE's professions of good conduct.

So, is the Tamil-Muslim divide Fact or Fiction? It is both.

(Courtesy of Weekend Express)

CLASSIFIED ADS

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Phone: 0181-644 0972 Fax: 0181-241 4557

MATRIMONIAL

Jaffna Hindu brother, *professional engineer and Canadian citizen, working in Canada, seeks educated vegetarian groom for his slim, fair, strict vegetarian science graduate sister, 32 years, 5'3", teaching Physics and Computers at Colombo. Please telephone 613 547 5940 (Canada).*

Jaffna Hindu brother *seeks good looking bride, 25 to 30, for graduate (Mathematics & Computing) brother, 34, permanent UK resident in employment. Please send horoscope and photo (returnable). M 920 c/o Tamil Times.*

US Hindu parents *seek professional bride (US preferred) for MBA, East West culture son, 28, holding responsible position, horoscope immaterial. Details, photo please, M 921 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu parents *residing in Norway seek bridegroom between 30-35 for daughter, 27, Norwegian citizen. Prepared to sponsor if in Sri Lanka or elsewhere. Send horoscope, details. M 922 c/o Tamil Times.*

Seeking *professionally qualified partner, 39 to 45, for Christian spinster doctor in UK employment. Christians, Catholics considered. Please give all details in first letter. Divorcees, widowers not considered. M 923 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu parents *seek groom for daughter, 35, graduate teacher in Sri Lanka, Mars afflicted, willing migrate. Send horoscope, details. M 924 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu parents *seek bride for son, 28, 5'6", computer engineer in excellent UK employment. Send horoscope, details. M 925 c/o Tamil Times.*

Mother *seeks educated Hindu partner for MBA professional son, 33, working in Canada. Please send details. M 926 c/o Tamil Times.*

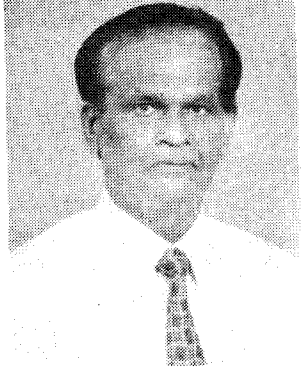
OBITUARIES

Mrs. Samathanaranee Arnold *dearly beloved wife of the late Rev. J.V.J. Arnold (Pastor J.D.C.S.I.), loving mother of Jeyaranee, late Rajan, Balan, Sunthari, Kirupa, Vathana and Chandran; mother-in-law of Yogam Lyman, Pathmini, Vimala, Leslie Somanader, Ranjana, Sathyan Kadirgamar and Thevamanohari; much loved sister of late Mr. M.R.M. Jebaratnam and late Rev. J.M. Singanayagam passed away peacefully to be with her Lord on the 22nd of February 1997.*

Her funeral service was held at her residence in Manipay on the 23rd of February.

Thanks giving services were held in Melbourne and at the C.S.I. Church, Colombo.

The members of her family thank all friends and relatives who attended the services and sent messages of sympathy. – 'Peacelyn', Uduvil Road, Manipay.



Dr. Chelvathamby Perumal Pillai, *Chairman/Managing Director, Agriculture Industry Consultancy Service (AICS); President, IAWID and retired FAO/UN Official; beloved husband of the late Gnanambikai Perumal Pillai; loving father of Ravi, Usha, Jeeva and Ranjit; loving father-in-law of Shanthi, Desmond, Michael and Vasuki; everloving grandfather of Rajesh, Shahila, Meera, Arun and Arjun passed away peacefully on Sunday, 2nd March in Colombo. Cremation took place on 5th March 1997.*

The members of the family express their deepest gratitude and thanks to all relatives and friends who assisted and supported them during the time of their bereavement and those who attended the funeral and sent messages of condolence. – 78 Boileau Road, Ealing, London W5 3AJ. Tel: 0181 997 9414.

IN MEMORIAM

In Loving Memory of Our Beloved

Daddy	*Mummy*
Ponnampalam Kanagaratnam	**Vemalaranee Kanagaratnam**
Born: 11.10.1908	*10.7.1923*

Rest: 2.3.1982 *31.3.90*

Gently with love your memory is kept
Your affection and kindness
We will never forget
You both are always in our thoughts
And for ever in our hearts.

Remembered with love and affection by sons Sara, Brem and Dubsy; daughters-in-law Lalitha and Shyamala; and grandchildren Janarthan, Mehala, Uthistran, Arani and Anuja. – 19 Huxley Place, Palmers Green, London N13 5SU. Tel: 0181 886 5966.

In loving memory of **Dr. Sinnathamby Selvarajah,** *Retired R.M.P., Kandermadam, Jaffna on the Fifth Anniversary of his passing away on 25.3.92.*

'Love and memories last for ever'.

Sadly missed and lovingly remembered by his wife Thanaluxmy, children, son-in-law, daughters-in-law and grand children. – 6 Birchwood Close, Blackwood, Gwent NP2 1WX.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

March 29 *6.30pm Asian Education & Fine Arts Trust presents Carnatic Vocal Concert by Shanmuka Priya & Hari Priya Subba Ram at Winston Churchill Hall, Pinn Way, Ruislip, Middx. Tel: 0181 904 7387/ 930 3811.*

April 2 *Ekathasi.*

Apr. 3 *Feast of St. Richard; Krishna Ekathasi.*

Apr. 5 *Feast of St. Vincent; Pirathosam.*

Apr. 6 *6.30pm Carnatic Vocal Recital by Priya Sisters at Highgate Murugan Temple Hall, 200A Archway Road, London N6 5BA. Tel: 0181 348 9835.*

Apr. 7 *Amavasai.*

Apr. 10 *Chathurthi; Karthigai.*

Apr. 11 *Feast of St. Stanislaus.*

Apr. 12 *Shashdi.*

Apr. 13 *12.30pm S.C.O.T. presents Tamil New Year Lunch and 20th Anniversary Celebrations at Victoria Hall, Ealing Town Hall. Tel: 0181 952 7249.*

Apr. 14 *Hindu New Year.*

Apr. 16 *Feast of St. Bernadette.*

Apr. 19 *6.30pm Tamil Association of Brent conducts Tamil New Year Celebrations at Brent Town Hall, Forty Lane, Wembley, Middx. Tel: 0181 868 6485.*

Apr. 20 *Pirathosam.*

Apr. 22 *Full Moon.*

Apr. 23 *Feast of St. George.*

Apr. 25 *Feast of St. Mark.*

Apr. 29 *Feast of St. Catherine.*

May 3 *6.15pm Kokuvil Hindu College O.S.A. (UK Branch) presents Variety Entertainment at Claremont High School Hall, Claremont Avenue, Kenton, Harrow, Middx. Tel: 0181 578 3159/761 0358.*

At Bhawan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 0171 381 3086/ 4608.

Apr. 13 *6.00pm Kuchipudi Dance by Yasoda Rao from India.*

Apr. 26 *7.00pm Carnatic Vocal by Sivasakthi Sivanesan.*

Apr. 27 *6.00pm Bharatha Natyam by Nina Rajarani.*

Kancheepuram Kurai Sarees, Silk Verties, Shawls & Pavadais

Please Phone
Mrs Sita Venkatraman
0181 203 1786
Fax: 0181 203 6619

AUSTRALIAN NEWSLETTER

The Vembadi Old Girls' Association *Dinner-Dance took place at the Ryde Civic Centre, Sydney on 22nd November 1997. Guests started arriving at 7.00pm and were served with drinks and short-eats. The well known Sri Lankan band 'Amits' provided the music. At 8.30, the school anthem and the Tamil anthem were sung with great gusto by the Old Girls assembled and the President of the O.G.A. Mrs. Devi Balasubramaniam welcomed the guests. She said that the Committee had worked very hard to organise the function, so that Old Girls could meet and relive their fond memories of Vembadi. She said that whatever profits were made would be banked in Sydney and remitted to the school back at home whenever there is a specific request. She thanked the committee, the advertisers, the caterers, the band, the compere, the Ryde Civic Centre and all those present for their wonderful response.*

The guests took to the dance floor till 9.30 when dinner was served. During dinner there was a Souvenir Draw and a Lucky Door Prize Draw and dancing continued with Baila music and songs followed by the Macarena. The dance floor was packed with people having a great time. There was a coffee break at 11.15, followed by the raffle draw and a vote of thanks by the secretary Mrs. Shantha Fonseka and dancing continued till 1.00am. The function was a great success and most guests wanted to know when the next Dinner-Dance was going to be held.

The Tamil Senior Citizens' Association *of Sydney organised a Thai Pongal Festival on 11th January at the Homebush Public School Hall. The programme included Music, Dances, Flute and Veena recitals by members, their children and friends. The hall was packed with members, their friends and well-wishers. At the end of the programme various tasty dishes including sweet 'Pongal' were served.*

On Australia Day – 26th January – the Senior Citizens set up a free food stall in Strathfield Park as part of the celebrations and it was greatly appreciated by the local population.

CANADIAN NEWSLETTER

Weather: *Here in Toronto, it is cloudy and mild. Blistering wind with intermittent light snow seems to be the order of the day. Elsewhere in the country, the temperature is above seasonal norm.*

Five Years Residence Requirement: *A recent directive from the Federal Minister for Citizenship and Immigration stipulates that application for Landed Immigrant Status can only be made after a period of five years from the date the refugee sans I.D. arrives in Canada. Exception however is made in the case of the Somalis and Afghans on the ground that there are no governments in these countries. There are about 15,000 refugees in this class, the Afghans number 700, the Somalis 6,800 and the Sri Lankan Tamils constitute 1,400 of the balance. This class of refugees when they make the application for landed status after five years residence have to fill in an additional form – Undocumented Convention Refugee in Canada Class (UCRCC). Their travails do not end there, as they have to pass another hurdle – the Security Clearance – which should take yet another 2 to 3 years. These refugees are in a no-win situation as Canada Immigration insists on an identity document obtained prior to arriving in Canada.*

Armed Tamil, Punjabi Youths Take to the Street: *Armed confrontation erupted between Tamil and Punjabi teenagers recently near an Etobicoke high rise in the Kipling and Finch area. It indicates an extremely worrying escalation of gang activity among Tamil and sub continental communities. What is more shocking is the kind of armoury that seems to be at the disposal of these youth gangs.*

A Tribute to Mr. Mohandas K. Samuel

It is indeed a great privilege and honour to pay tribute to Mr Mohandas K. Samuel, a colleague, a very dear friend, a distinguished economist and an exemplary human being. Mr. Samuel or 'Sammy' as he was known to his friends and colleagues, joined the Asian Development Bank in December 1970. The quality of his work and expertise earned him recognition throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Consequently in 1977, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia-Pacific (ESCAP), which is based in Bangkok, requested the services of Mr. Samuel to help expand its activities, for an initial period of one year. However, due to Sammy's valued contribution to furthering its objectives, ESCAP sought the Bank's favourable consideration to extend Sammy's services for another three years. Shortly after his return to the Asian Development Bank, Sammy, was among other things, made responsible for the publication of an annual report entitled. 'The Development Outlook' which was one of the Bank's flagship projects. This publication which analyses the economic performances of all the developing member countries of the Bank and examines their future prospects is presented to an invited audience of leading economists world wide at a seminar which coincides with the Bank's Annual Meeting in April.

The famous Lebanese philosopher Kahlil Gibran has said:

'You give but little when you give of your possessions,
It is only when you give of yourself that you truly give.'

Sammy has always freely given of himself to his colleagues, friends, family and community.

He was instrumental in establishing the Staff Association of the Asian Development Bank. He worked hard and freely gave of his time and money to resolve inconsistencies that were perceived to exist between the Bank's Personnel policies and practices. I am personally aware that he always graciously declined offers of financial contributions from his colleagues who stood to benefit substantially from the success of Sammy's efforts. His wise counsel was always sought by friends and colleagues. Even after his retirement in January 1995, whenever Sammy visited the Bank, his colleagues would be seen to eagerly invite him into their offices for advice on a variety of matters.

Besides his selfless service to the Bank, friends, colleagues and community, he was also an exemplary family man. He was a devoted son to his mother, a kind and caring brother, a doting father to his lovely children and a very dear and loving husband to his beloved Utaiwan. In fact my wife and I have always thought of Sammy and Utaiwan as caring and loving to each other and to others and wish we could always be like that.

In our culture we equate a selfless person such as Sammy to a great tree which by nature, not only provides sustenance to all but also shade to those who live near it and to passers by. Today the life of such a great and noble tree has come to an end.

We know that Sammy has ascended to the finest place ever. We consider our encounter with Sammy as a truly enriching experience. The highest tribute we can ever pay such a noble human being is to emulate his example.

Dr. Sri B. Sri-Skanda-Rajah,
London.
Saturday, 08 February, 1997.

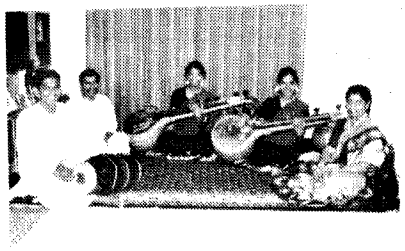
Shobana's Natyam Skill

It is unfortunate that a visiting Bharatanatyam artiste had to be introduced to our London Tamil audience via her appearance in films. True, this young artiste Shobana Chandrakumar of Madras sponsored by Sangamam a local arts group, has appeared in some Malayalam films, and incidentally related to the former film star Padmini. But in her own right Shobana is a frontline Bharatanatya star, trained by the well known Chitra Visveswaran. Her performance on the Logan Hall stage on 18th January was a model which contained every classical element prescribed by ancients. The programme was the usual pattern but the variety of Adavus and detailed Abhinaya sequences showed the dancer's training and involvement. Nattuvangam was by Srikala Suresh, another

Chitra Visveswaran product, and music was by Girija Ramaswamy, a post-graduate of Madras University, Mridangam by Perunkulam Sundararaman and flute by Srinivasan.

It is a pity that our aspiring dance students and teachers were not seen to watch this programme. The admission rate could have been more wisely structured to attract wider audience. The sponsors deserve congratulations.

The Triumph of The Trio



The Triple Arangetrams – two Veenas and a Mirudangam – of two sisters and their brother, children of Sri and Smt Chandrapalan took place at the Greenford Town Hall on 29.9.96. The eagerness, interest and dedication of the family to commit time and effort and encourage the youngsters to perfect the art forms was indeed laudable.

The two sisters Pirabalini and Bruntha, students of Smt Sivatharini Sahadevan were the stars on the Veena and their brother Senthouran, student of Sri Muthu Sivarajah was the star on the Mirudangam. Both Gurus are from the London Tamil Centre.

Right from the commencement of the repertoire, the youngsters were full of confidence and their performance mirrored this. With a customary Varnam, Viriboni in Bhairavi Ragam they proceeded to execute various Ragas and Thalas in varying rhythm and subtlety. The Trio have a keen interest in Tamil language and I have heard young Bruntha sing before and there is no doubt that the basic knowledge of religion, culture, language and musicology has enabled all three of them to understand and appreciate the instrumental intricacies of Indian music.

Piraba and Bruntha under the able guidance of their Guru played the Veena with utmost ease. They had mastered the finger and hand movements well and their playing brought out the details of the Ragas, Swaras and the lyrics of the individual items they were rendering, obviously because of their knowledge of vocal music. Senthouran with his able Guru by his side was equally at ease and immersed himself in the whole programme like a professional with many years of experience behind him. Only the soft and non interfering guidance of his Guru reminded us that this was an Arangetram. The Thani Avarthanam, Jugalbandi performed with Sri Bhaskaran on Ghatam and Sri Kandiah Sithamparanathan on Morsing was composed with many Tala variations and performed it perfectly. The traditional manner of teaching by both their Gurus has no doubt been the foundation for the execution of excellence.

Sri Karaikudi Krishnamoorthy, the Mirudangam Virtuoso and Smt Saraswathy Packiarajah, an eminent musicologist and Sri Ratnam Niththyananthan of London Tamil Centre praised the youngsters for their masterly performance and their Gurus for their tireless teaching. Smt Arasi Ponnambalam compered the programme well with her good command and perfect diction of Tamil.

We should look forward to the youngsters performing again and hope they will soon, as I know that none of them have packed up their instruments after the big day.

Dr. (Smt) Manju Sivanathan.

Kavadi Festival in Seychelles

Large crowds of devotees thronged the sidewalks of the roads around the Navasakthi Vinayagar Temple in Victoria, Seychelles on the morning of 23.1.97 to watch and enjoy the multi-coloured Kavadi moving step by step to the Thavil and Nathaswaram music. The occasion was Thai Poosam, an important Hindu festival celebrated in many countries, including Seychelles.

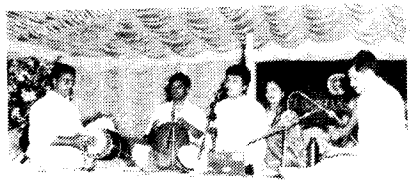
Devotees watched motionless the piercing of sharp silver needles all over the body, the cheeks and the tongues of seven devotees who carried the colourful Alagu Kavadis. While large crowds witnessed the colourful saree-clad ladies carry pots of milk on their heads to fulfil their vows to Lord Murugan and the males carry Patkavadis, buckets of tumeric-water were splashed all over the road to keep the path of the procession cool and to ward off all types of infection.

Tamil Storytelling Sessions

Ealing Road Library will be hosting Tamil Storytelling sessions for young children on alternate Saturdays from 8th March 1997 from 9.30 to 10.30am.

The storytelling will be performed by the West London Tamil School. Yamuna Tharmeniran, the Library's Customer Services Manager, who organised the highly successful Tamil Bazaar and Bookfayre last year said: 'We are very happy to collaborate with the Tamil School in promoting Tamil mother tongue teaching and hope that the story telling will encourage the young children to borrow the library's growing collection of Tamil children's books'.

Unni Krishnan Excels



Tamil Orphans Trust in London should have been pleased at their effort in inviting the youthful Carnatic vidwan Unnikrishnan for their fund raising programme on 9th February at Brent Town Hall. (South London friends would remember his surprise appearance on the stage of Kalabhavanam in mid 1995). Already acquainted through a film hit in Malayalam, a full house attended and enjoyed the brilliant performance of Unnikrishnan with his expert accompanists. The selection of compositions, elaboration of the main ragas and the swara formulations were something to be admired from this youthful master. V. Ramamurthi on the violin, S. Ranganathan on the mridangam and A. Shankar on the Gatam did a splendid job. The presence of Unni's young wife with her Tambura was glittering.

Although the concert was brilliant by itself, the decorated canopy of the auditorium swallowed most of the reverberation essential for music concerts. The Orphans Trust is to be congratulated for this concert, but as a matter of courtesy some one should have spoken complimenting the performance. Instead, permitting a frivolous and ill mannered babble on the stage is deprecated.

– Sivapatha Sundaram.

Dance Debut of Dakshayi

The Bharatha Natya Arangetram of Dakshayi daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Danapathy of East Ham and disciple of Natya Visharatha Annapoorani Sathyamoorthy took place at the Thurrock Civic Hall, Essex on 23.11.96. Being a devotee of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, she chose his birth date for this auspicious event. Smt Annapoorani is the Director of Sri Meenakshi Bharata Natya Pathi in East Ham and Dakshayi is the third student to have her graduation under this talented and dedicated teacher.

Dakshayi should be commended for her swift footwork and stamina, which was very noticeable in the Varnam 'Samiyai' in

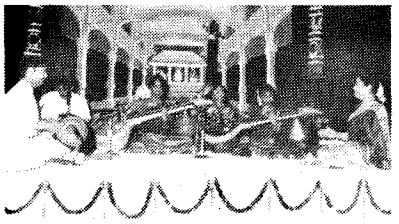
Poorvikalyani Ragam and the Thillana in Kadanakuthookala Ragam. She also excelled in the Dasavatharam and the patham on Goddess Ahilandeswari in Rāgamalika composed by Sri S. Sathyamoorthy. The Chief Guest Mr. R. Pathmanathan, President of Saiva Munnetta Sangam (UK) highly complimented this multi talented young lady.

The orchestra for the evening consisted of Nattuvangam: Smt Annapoorani Sathyamoorthy, Vocal: Smt Ambika Thamotheram, Mridangam: Sri Muthu Sivarajah, Veena: Smt Gomathy Subramaniam, Flute: Sri P. Gnanavarathan and Morsing: Sri K. Sithamparanathan.

Yogaratnam Wins Award

Mr. Visuvalingam Yogaratnam of Hereford has been presented the William Hunting Award which is given annually in recognition of the best clinical article by a practising veterinary surgeon in the 'Veterinary Record'. His paper 'Analysis of the causes of high rates of carcase rejection at a poultry processing plant' was chosen as a winner in this year's award. The picture of Mr. Yogaratnam receiving the award of a silver medal and £250 from Mr. R.M. Stephenson, the President of the British Veterinary Association appears above.

Vina Arangetram of Yamini and Vahini



The Vina Arangetram of Yamini and Vahini, daughters of Mr. & Mrs. Paramesan and students of Smt Sivasakti Sivanesan took place on 26.10.96. They did their Guru proud that day and it was a privilege to have as chief guest Dr. Basu, acting director of the Nehru Centre, and Mrs. Basu as well as Guests of Honour including Dr. M.N. Nandakumara, Mrs. West from Tiffin Girls' School, Mrs. Saraswathi Pakiaraja and Mrs. Dhanadevi Mitradevi, a renowned violinist from Canada.

Yamini and Vahini were beautifully supported on Mrdangam by Vidwan M. Balachandar, happily in rhythmic accompaniment by Vidwan R.N. Prakash on Ghatam and Selvi Devaki Gnananandha providing Tambura sruti. Yamini and Vahini opened a rich and varied programme with Vanajakshi in Kalyani followed by Vandenishamam in Hamsadhvani providing the artistes a chance to display some musical fireworks. There ensued the Pancharatna piece by Tyagaraja in which they performed the complex Svarasahitiya Charanas excellently. Another piece from Mysore Vasudevacharyar followed, the principal item before the Interval. Their playing was superb and their passages of Kalpanasvara dexterous in the extreme.

After the interval Yamini and Vahini rose to fresh highlights in their Ragam Tanam and Pallavi. After a really excellent Alapana and Tanam they performed the Pallavi superbly to be followed by Ragamalika passages and svara that included Kalyanavasantam and Mohanam. 'Kalki's' Malai poludinile was followed by the delightful praise of Goddess Minakshi, Jagajjanani, in Ratipatipriya. Your reviewer found himself 'singing along' to it! Thunbam nerkayil and Thillana rounded off an altogether wonderful debut performance. After speeches the performance was concluded with Tiruppukal and Mangalam. All success to Yamini and Vahini in the future!

Dr. John R. Marr.

The Late S. Jeyasingham, Advocate

In June last year there passed away in Adelaide, Australia, S. Jeyasingham, Advocate, after heart surgery. He was the son of S. Sabaratnam (Postmaster) and the grandson of S. Sinnathamby, well-known as Headmaster for a long time of the Methodist Tamil School of Puloly South. The death was mourned by all who knew him.

His mother was from Chavakachcheri, and so Jeyam (as he was known to his friends) had his early education at Drieberg College, Chavakachcheri. Then he went to Jaffna College, Vaddukoddai, and passed the London Intermediate Examination-in-Arts. Later, he joined the Law College and passed out as an Advocate. He set up practice in Point Pedro, where the family was well known.

In course of time, he built up a good practice. As a lawyer, he was known for his integrity, for his ability as a cross-examiner and his sound and lucid exposition of the law. He was also known for his helpfulness and generosity, as his clients will testify.

He built his house opposite Hartley College, and so we became close friends. Mrs. Jeyasingham was a good hostess, and many were the happy Friday evenings we spent after the week's work was over. Jeyam was widely read in many fields: literature, history, politics etc. He was a stimulating conversationalist, but forthright in the expression of his views. Like many young idealists of his day, he was a Communist in politics. It was generally believed that young Communists were trained by the Party in the Arts of Debate. Many who heard Jeyam explaining the many virtues of Communism realized how good a debater he was.

While his friend, P. Kandiah, contested Parliamentary elections, Jeyam took part in Local Government. As Chairman of the Kaddaively Village Committee, he ran a model administration. He was unsparing in the condemnation of wrong and dealt firmly with offenders.

During the late eighties and nineties, when things became unsettled in the North-East, and the Law Courts were not functioning and outspokenness became a hazard, he lived with his daughters in Brunei and Australia. In 1995, when the Jeyasinghams came to the U.K. for their niece's wedding, we met several times. Talking of his operation, he said, 'I must have the operation. I am not afraid to die, but my wife will miss me, though our daughters will do all they can.'

He passed away on 3rd June, 1996 and the funeral took place at the house of his cousin T. Vijayaraj, in Adelaide. Our sincerest sympathies to his wife, Thevi (Darwin, Australia), to Vathanie (Brunei), and Jeyanthie (Nigeria) his daughters, and their families.

K. Pooranampillai.

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